

Light in darkness

You could be forgiven feeling some anxiety - worrying about yet another filibuster on the third chapter of John. Yes - we're in "God so loved the world" territory (again) and it's possible that I have worn out your patience with my thoughts on the use and abuse of John 3:16 (in particular.) But since this is the Lenten Sunday traditionally marked for 'relief' - a day of 'rose' in a season of purple, I'm persuaded to forge gently ahead.

In a lectionary year devoted to Mark's gospel we once again get sidetracked in John - mostly because John takes us deliberately toward the passion and the promise of Holy Week in a way that makes life easier for those who put the lectionary together. Because who wants to dash breathlessly around (as Mark tells the story) the Palestinian landscape with Jesus when we can ponder the poetic grandeur of Jesus according to John? This is Lent and Easter as we best imagine it, so...

And in Chapter three, of course we've met Nicodemus - asking his questions and opening his heart to Jesus under the cover of darkness; secretly learning and wondering and - ultimately - accepting that God is indeed working mightily in a brand-new way. And Jesus' talk of lifting up and loving and saving and so on tries to bring these nighttime conversations into a new light. God's own light.

"God so loved the world" has become the iconic scrap of Christian thought - more common in public imagination than any other verse - but Jesus' talk of the contrast between light and darkness has become the heart of Christian struggle, and may be the idea on which the whole enterprise turns.

As a metaphor, it seems perfect. We talk of 'shady characters', or those whose smile 'lights up the room.' We crave the clear definitions - the binary thinking that we imagine makes life easier. But Jesus' metaphor is more complex.

Darkness and light co-exist - each with its own attractive power. The light is in the world, and yet darkness persists, because darkness is attractive - it suits our purposes. Darkness mirrors our mood. Light offers the chance for redemption. This is a cycle we understand - one that offers permission to fail and the promise of a new start. But when light and darkness compete for our affections, a strange thing happens.

Dusk. Dawn. Moments of 'both-and' that play tricks on our eyes and mingle hope and fear together.

## Light in darkness

Anyone who loves the early morning, or those who can't wait to turn their eyes to the stars will understand that the boundary between darkness and light is not fixed. The change is gradual - the reality of light sneaks up on you. The arrival of complete darkness is a slow, seductive process.

Jesus words suggest that there is always a choice - The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light. This is one of those 'both-and' moments that Jesus offers - not that Jesus is encouraging us to flirt with darkness, but because there is always a chance to encounter good and Godly deeds - even in the dark.

From an early age I was afraid of the dark. Prone to spectacular nightmares - small enough to be a target for nocturnal bullies - I hated walking home from events at night. Everything about the darkness seemed sinister, until the night things changed.

Walking home from a hockey game across the fairgrounds, something about the night made me stop and look around. I might have heard a noise, or imagined I was being followed. And when I looked around and saw nothing, I then glanced up...and saw everything. Light in the midst of my darkness. Carl Sagan's 'billions and billions' of stars - raging against the darkness; a thousand points of light, offering hope to a frightened teenager. I knew nothing of Jesus' metaphor in that moment; I only knew that I was not scared of the dark anymore.

In a world of multiple choices; in a time of encroaching darkness; as we live out this new and agonizing metaphor of good and bad - evil and righteous - darkness and light - may you be strengthened and comforted by the glimmers of light that only reveal themselves when it is darkest.

In a time of conflict and confusion, may we remember that the light stands before us - among us - ready to show us the way.

As we share in the Sacrament of grace at the Lord's table today, perhaps we will actually be 'enlightened' in the sharing of this sacred meal.

None of this will eliminate the darkness - people still love the darkness, because their deeds are evil. No, the darkness remains, but the Light will always shine. The darkness cannot overcome this light.