

Coach House Church

BEACONS

HOPE

24TH NOVEMBER 2020

It's at this time of year that darkness is very real. We wake up in the dark and return home in the dark, with the shortened daylight hours. And it can really affect people, not seeing and feeling daylight. It's no wonder that when the sun comes out, there are people heading to the nearest green space, finding jobs to do outside. This has been especially so this year with people desperately taking every opportunity to be outside whenever the weather and the regulations allow.

The physical darkness can bring out a host of emotions. Young children waking up in the dark are often scared. I can remember not wanting to look under the bed in the dark when I was little, or seeing a familiar object which cast shadows in strange shapes and imagining all sorts of creatures lurking about.

One year, in the Lake District in December, we completed a walk across the fells which started off in crisp clear frosty daylight. However, having misjudged how long it would take to walk over the heather strewn fields and hidden peat bogs, the final steps of the journey were in fading light and eventually darkness. On a new or unknown route with the light fading you become more and more unsure of your footing, or even which direction you are going in. It wasn't a good feeling until, in the distance, the smallest fleck of light could be seen. The lights of the café were a welcome sight and the hot chocolate and cake were a well-deserved reward. This darkness brought unease and uncertainty. In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah was a Hebrew prophet who lived about 700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. Born in Jerusalem, Israel, he was said to have found his calling as a prophet when he saw a vision in the year of King Uzziah's death.

Read about this amazing vision in Isaiah chapter 6.

Isaiah prophesied the coming of the Messiah Jesus Christ. He had a message for the people of Israel that the spiritual darkness would not last forever, that there was hope.

Isaiah 9:2 says The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.

Isaiah continues in v6

6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

This is a key verse in any Christmas service and reflects how essential it is for us to have hope. The phrase, 'light at the end of the tunnel' is often used to talk about a seemingly desperate situation, but where there is a glimmer of hope, not yet realised, but in the far distance.

I believe it is no surprise that we celebrate Jesus' birth in the middle of the winter. In the middle of winter, we know that Spring is around the corner and this means we look forward to warmer, lighter days. We can look at our gardens, full of rotten leaves, bare branches and seemingly dead twigs but we know that beneath the earth, waiting for the warmer weather and sunlight are the shoots of new life. The berries are bright red on the trees ready for the birds to eat and the evergreen leaves are another symbol of life continuing through dark winter days.

When the days are short, we resort to decorating our houses with lights. I know that Christians took the date of a previous winter festival to celebrate Christmas but it helps us to realise that light has such an impact in the darkness. Jesus describes himself as it says in John 8:12 saying

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Jesus is the one who can dispel the darkness.

On any journey we need to know where we are going, to see the pathway ahead and for this we need light. On life's journey, we also need light for direction, for comfort, for safety and so we arrive at our desired destination.

In Psalm 119 v 104 the psalmist tells us:

'Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.'

It points us to the bible to find inspiring words that will help us on our own journey through life.

Quite frankly, if all we had was our own wisdom to rely on, then where would we be? Particularly when you are in a quandary, it's good to get advice, another point of view or support with your own ideas. The bible is always a good place for this. Two particular passages spring to mind.

One of my favourite sets of verses is Proverbs 3: 5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
6 in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.[a]

It reminds us that we have to put our trust in God who knows the right path to take.

Another inspiring passage which is full of hope, Psalm 139:1-6

- 1 You have searched me, LORD,
and you know me.
- 2 You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- 3 You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
- 4 Before a word is on my tongue
you, LORD, know it completely.
- 5 You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.

Verse 5 reminds me of God's protection and guiding hand. It continues

- 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.
- 7 Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
- 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
- 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
- 10 even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
- 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
- 12 even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

The words from v12 ' even the darkness will not be dark to you' are echoed in a song I heard on the radio.

The lyrics stood out: 'your darkest hour is only 60 minutes long' and 'tomorrow is another day'. Sometimes we feel that the darkness is surrounding us, that situations are just getting worse and that we have no control. Darkness can be debilitating, particularly if you are awake in the small dark hours, unable to sleep, restless with your thoughts when time seems to slow down and is endless. Isaiah 40: 31 reminds us 'those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength'.

We don't have to be fearful of the darkness because we can have peace through the Holy Spirit.

We have to remember that God sent Jesus to be our light, our Hope, our guide and our strength in tough times and in better days. There are difficult situations to deal with but we don't manage alone. We have Jesus, Immanuel, God with us, the Holy Spirit of God. Romans 12:12 tells us to Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Romans 15:13 can be used as a prayer for everyone at this time of year: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.



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