

SERMON: Sunday – 1 January 2023 – Rev Alistair Cowper

God with us: Punching holes in the darkness

Hebrews 2:10-18

Mathew 2:13-23

Mary and Joseph and the newborn baby Jesus are forced to flee to Egypt because it wasn't safe to stay in Judea or even in Israel. God's care for them, directs them to safety through the word of the angel of God, the word that defies the demonic plans of Herod. God's word will not return empty but will achieve what it sets out to do.

Yet it's into a dark world that this new light comes to save all people. Jesus, is God with us; the God who is at the same time Saviour of all.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (John 3:17).

It seems the world always has it's hell bent dictators. Witness what Putin is doing in Ukraine at the moment.

Herod cared nothing for the sanctity of human life, as it appears every warlord has since, and misuses his power to order the death of innocent children.

But people like Herod meet the same fate as all of us eventually and the day came when Herod died, only to be replaced by his cruel son Archelaus in 4BC, probably the same year as Jesus was born.

It's fitting that Jesus grew up away from the centre of attention in Jewish religious life. As a Nazarene he'd have been seen as an outsider from an out of the way kind of backwater a place.

Our reading from the Book of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus "had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect" (17) and maybe this means that he needed to be able to experience the harsh realities of life as well as life's easier times.

We have a Saviour who has identified with every kind of human experience and who therefore is one with all people and one for all people.

As God with us, Christ is a light in every darkness.

As the writer to the Hebrews says,

Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested (18).

We don't have a god who knows nothing about hardship, about being a refugee, about living in poverty, about being scorned or spat upon or whipped or beaten or crucified even.

We have a Saviour, a God, who is every bit connected, involved in, and identifies with all the suffering in this world and who is able to bring light into the dark places of suffering BECAUSE he has gone through it with us and for us.

I was thinking about what that means after being sent a newsletter article written by a retired minister friend of mine in which he told the story of Robert Louis Stevenson recalling a memorable night from his boyhood.

(SLIDE)

As he stood in front of a window watching the darkness fall, an old-fashioned lamplighter made his way down the street, lighting lamp after lamp, and leaving behind him small pools of light.

"Look," the young R.L.S. called to his nanny, "look, there's a man punching holes in the darkness."

My friend Gordon asked the question, so how do you punch holes in the darkness?

And suggested that we do so by lighting a light.

God sent Jesus to punch a hole in the darkness of the world.

As one of the Old Testament prophets said,

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." (Isaiah ch 9 v2)

The disciple John said about Jesus,

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness could not put it out." (John ch1 v5)

And Jesus himself said, "I am the light of the world." (John ch8 v12)

At this first day of another new year we rejoice in the light of Jesus, and remember that He told His first followers (and by implication ourselves too) "Let your light shine before others so that they may see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew ch 5 v16)

Where can we find some pockets of darkness and start punching holes in them? Because I think this is what God wants us to be able to do; as we find ourselves at the start of another new year and we get round to thinking about what is it that we want to resolve to do; what is it that matters; as we get back to basics of living out our faith in a way that is life giving and light bringing, to us as well as to others.

All around us there are places where selfishness, prejudice, greed and hatred persist, even in dark corners of our own hearts.

What can we do, when the light of Jesus fills us, to punch holes in these dark places?

In the words of the chorus,
"This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.. Where there's a dark corner in this land I'm gonna let my little light shine.."

May the Light of God bless and keep you, and yours, this New Year and beyond into every year.