

SERMON: 24 December 2018 11.30PM – Rev Alistair Cowper

“The Christ of Christmas is With Us”

(Psalm 98, Isaiah 52:7-10, Hebrews 1:1-12 and John 1:1-14)

I don't know about you but I love the darkness.
For example No lights in house

There's something restoring about darkness.
We sleep better in the dark.
Sleep is a time of restoration and rejuvenation.
We all know what it's like to miss sleep and how that can affect us.

It's a time when, maybe even subconsciously,
we put to bed the things of the day
and we make plans for the future.

Sometimes these can be vivid dreams and visions, sometimes just a knowing.

So the darkness can be a time of endings and new beginning.

Darkness is our friend.

Think about how in the beginning
the earth was formless and empty,
darkness was over the surface of the deep,
and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters -
ready to birth this new creation.

Our world is so ordered to cycle in seasons.
The winter is a darker time,
when little seems to be growing,
When things die back,
ready to be reborn when the Spring comes.

I heard someone talk (Alexander John Shaia) about that recently in relation to Celtic thinking about winter.

He argued that the period between 3 November and the 25 December was seen as a time of holy darkness, a longer season of advent, which ended with the winter solstice of 21 December.

The solstice lasted three days, and so 25 December was significant in that it was the day the sun was believed to begin radiating afresh after its solstice, its standing still (*sol*=sun; *stice*=still).

How apt then that this day was chosen to mark the birth of the Christ, the Anointed One, the Light shining in the darkness.

So, we can find God in the darkness,
We are invited to be born again in the darkness.
One of the things that struck me in listening to this talk was that there is a wealth of resources deep within us.

It brought to mind a verse from the Book of Isaiah,

With joy you will draw water
from the wells of salvation. (Isaiah 12:3)

I think God wants us to discover fresh resources in the dark, like drawing water from a deep well.

There are deep riches of grace that lie waiting to be pulled up and then acted upon in the daylight or when its time for things to begin to grow again after a barren period.

And just like waking up in the light of morning,
God wants us to wake up from the place of darkness and move out into the light.

Jesus said, I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. (John 12:46);

and he also said,

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. (John 8:12).

Christmas is the time when we realise that God, in Christ, has fully entered into the darkness of the human condition.

Why?

To bring an ending and a new beginning?

Yes, and:

1. (1)to save us from our self destruction, through his life, death and resurrection, and
2. (2)to bring the recovery of our God likeness, through the presence of the Holy Spirit
3. (3)To begin the process of reconciliation with God (“God and sinners reconciled”), even as we each express that likeness, that divine DNA, in a uniquely individual way.
4. (4)To enable all of creation to grow in the way of love, and into Love, the Source of all Creation.

“The true and essential work of all religion is to help us recognise and recover the divine image in everything” (Richard Rohr).

T.F.Torrance put it like this in his book on *The Incarnation*;

The incarnation of God’s eternal Son “fully reveals his being love ... giving himself up for others and having his being in his beloved ones, regardless of their responsiveness”.

Like many theologians before him, Torrance believed that the incarnation meant every living thing was affected for all time.

French philosopher, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin wrote that “Christ, through his Incarnation, is interior to the world, rooted in the world even in the very heart of the tiniest atom”.

These are Biblical thoughts. Paul says in that Christ “there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Colossians 3:11).

As T.F.Torrance put it, Jesus is the Christ who is incarnate as the Word of God, “stretched out to save us, the very heart of God almighty beating with the pulse of his infinite love within the depth of our lost humanity, in order to vanquish and do away with everything that separates man from God”.

So how do we step into this being love? Martin Luther famously emphasised its all about grace, and he put it like this, “the law says, do this and it’s never done (but) grace says, believe this, and everything is already done”.

Or as John’s Gospel puts it, “to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12).

Tonight, of all nights, in the middle of the darkness, we are celebrating this true light coming into our lives, to redeem us, to shine a spotlight on to our true selves and to guide us forward.

Tonight, God invites us:

To welcome the Christ light into our hearts.

To make room for the Christ life to be born in us.

To consent to Christ’s love as being the rule by which we live the rest of our lives.

So that we might begin to shine even more brightly in the darkness of this world until the day dawns when darkness will be no more.

I wish you all a bright and joyful Christmas