

Sometimes (it should be at least 4 times a week) I wake up early so that I can go for a walk before breakfast to get my 45 minutes plus of good exercise. Normally I thrash about in the dark, trying not to disturb Anne (my wife) as I gather up my clothes before stumbling towards the bathroom. Only once I'm in the bathroom do I put on the light. And then all is clear. And often what is clear is that I've picked up the wrong clothes.

The first act of creation was the creation of light. "And God said, "Let there be light", and there was light" (Genesis 1: 3). The world was in darkness. God spoke and there was light. God's word brought light to darkness. Wherever and whenever God speaks, the result is light. The psalmist says, "The unfolding of your words gives light" (Psalm 119: 130). "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Psalm 119:105). The opposite is also true. Where God's word is absent, darkness closes back in. We know from our own experience how a word can bring light. Maybe there's a topic you find confusing. And then someone explains it clearly or comes up with a great illustration. And you say, "Ah, now I get it. Now it makes sense".

In a similar way humanity is confused about life, God, identity, truth and the future. We're confused because we are creatures with a limited understanding. And we're confused because we are sinners with a warped understanding.

But at the first Christmas, says the apostle John in the Prologue to his Gospel, God's Word entered history in the person of Jesus. And what was the result? What it had always been and always is when God speaks: light. So John says, "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it". John describes how John the Baptist came as a witness to the imminent coming of the light (1: 6-8). "The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world", he says (1: 9).

In the Old Testament God brings light through his Word. What John tells us as he begins his Gospel is that Jesus is the living Word through whom God brings light. And that is what we see throughout John's Gospel. Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (8:12). In John 9, Jesus heals a blind man. It is a demonstration of his ability to bring light. The disciples assume that the man must be blind because of some specific sin. So, since the man was born blind, they ask whether it was the sin of the man himself or his parents. But Jesus says that the man was born blind "so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (9: 3). And what is it that will be displayed in this man? Jesus says immediately before healing the man, "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (9: 5). When the Pharisees rejected this healing and the healed man, Jesus comments, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind" (9: 39). The miracle embodies the way in which Jesus confirms the darkness of those who reject him, but brings light to those who receive him.

The light God shines - the Word he speaks - is Jesus. Now through the power of his Spirit, we are able to say, "Ah, now I get it. Now it makes sense". We're no longer blundering, no longer guessing. We can see the truth about life, God, identity, truth and the future. That is sometimes challenging - in the light of the Word, we see that we've picked up the wrong ideas or adopted the wrong behaviours. But that is always positive - because it brings clarity where once there was only confusion.

Jesus is the Word, through whom we hear God's voice and through whom God made the world. Now we see that Jesus is the Word through whom God brings light to the world.

John goes on in verse 5 of chapter 1 of his Gospel to say, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it". Is that true? Is that how it feels in your neighbourhood? In your workplace or place of study? In your culture? Often it feels as if the darkness is overcoming. It feels as if the light is flickering and faltering, like a failing

flame. "This is the verdict", says Jesus, "Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (3: 19).

The darkness has not overcome the light. Was that true at the cross? "Walk while you have light before the darkness overtakes you", says Jesus (12: 35). The word "overtake" is the same as "overcome" here in John 1: 5. There was a moment when the darkness overcame the light. And that moment was the cross. As Jesus hung on the cross, we are told that "darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon" (Mark 15: 33). The light of the world was covered over by darkness. And then the light was extinguished.

The cross is the ultimate expression of human hatred of God. We constantly and consistently reject the light of God's revelation. Why? Because our deeds are evil. In other words, we don't want to face the reality of who we are. And we don't want to change who we are. We don't want to know God because we prefer evil. Paul says in his letter to the church in Rome, "What may be known about God is plain to (people), because God has made it plain to them" (Romans 1: 19). But people "suppress the truth by their wickedness" (Romans 1: 18). We do this every day by ignoring the light of God. And when the light of God came in human form, we murdered him. Maybe now we can be left to our dark and evil ways.

But the light did not stay dead. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." Jesus the light rose again at dawn on the third day. As the light of a new day broke, so the light of a new age - the gospel age, the age of grace - dawned. "I have come into the world as a light", said Jesus, "so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness" (12: 46). Here's the thing: light always wins. It's an unequal contest. We know this from our own experience. Light and darkness are asymmetrical. Light dispels darkness simply by its presence whereas darkness doesn't naturally extinguish light. You can't have a "torch-dark" that casts a beam of darkness into the light! But a "torch-light" casts a beam of light into the darkness - no matter how much darkness there is.

Jesus says, "Put your trust in the light while there is still time; then you will become children of light" (12: 36). If you have put your trust in Jesus the light, then you are a child of light. And the darkness has not and will not overcome the children of light.

The world does not stay in darkness. At Christmas light entered the world. One of the passages we often read at our Christmas services is from the book of the prophet Isaiah: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned" (9: 2).

With the coming of the living Word, Jesus Christ, light broke into the darkness of this world. And with the resurrection of the Word, God declared that the light would never be extinguished. And, in putting our faith in Jesus, we have been called out of darkness. "We are a chosen people...a people belonging to God that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). We need never be overcome by the darkness, and can always live in the light. There is never any need for, nor any excuse for, returning to the darkness. May we walk in the light, as he is in the light so that we have fellowship with God and with one another, knowing that the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin (1 John 1: 7). And may we, like John the Baptist, be witnesses to the light, living to bear witness to the fact that Jesus is the light that illuminates our lives.

Amen