

God in the Dark

A Christmas Reflection

When Jesus was dying on the cross, Luke tells us that “darkness came over the whole land” (23:44). In the dark Jesus was surrounded by a hopeless and doomed land. His own life of seeming failure and pain looked doomed as it shared in the shame, pain and terror experienced by the disciples and those crucified alongside him. But even on the cross, the all-powerful word of God continued to save in and through the body of Jesus. Surely God’s all-powerful *and* vulnerable word, continues to leap down into our doomed land, sharing our place, saving and holding close all of us in this ‘doomed’ land.

In the dark, God’s word does not take away our pain or shame, but through love shares it, gives it hope and makes it bearable.

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(8.12.15)



There are times when we are confronted by the people we love, or ourselves, sinking into deep depression and contemplating suicide. There seems no way out, for them or us, of the shame or horror of past experiences of sexual, physical or mental abuse, no end to the pain and an emptiness in life. How can such people (and those who love them) be ‘saved’ in their darkness, and find hope? What has this to do with celebrating the Christmas festival? Is Christmas just a ‘silly season’? Can God really ‘save’ or is God to be held responsible for these death situations and rejected?

We read in The Wisdom of Solomon 18:14-15 (in the Apocrypha), “For while gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, your all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed...” These verses refer to God’s rescue or saving of the Israelites at midnight from slavery in Egypt, and, under Moses, leading them through the desert towards the Promised Land (Exodus 12:29).

Over the centuries, some Christians have associated this text with John 1:1-18, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”, describing the birth or incarnation of Jesus (Saviour) as a baby in Palestine; an action that took place at night.

When pondering the words “the land that was doomed” (referring to Egypt), I have asked myself, could these words be applied not only to a geographical place, but to places within people, people who are victims and perpetrators (for surely we are all both at some time) held in the grip of terrifying situations? These are dark places where we need help to continue living.

We can pray to God, but does God listen to us? Will God’s

all-powerful word leap down to help us? Or is God distant, silent, leaving us to battle on alone in the dark, or just give up?

When Jesus was born as a baby two people, Mary and Joseph, had to face shame, accusations and loss of social standing. Welcome and encouragement came from marginalised shepherds. God’s word spoke through them, their presence and actions.

The all-powerful word of God which was incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth is also incarnated in the world today, in people and their loving, caring relationships. Being incarnated, means making the word of God, God’s love, real, in and between created human bodies, and, I believe, it also involves nature. The word of God is not just spoken words, thoughts or felt emotions, but such words, thoughts and feelings lived out in actual loving actions towards others.

In Hebrews 4:12 we are told that “the word of God is living and active” - life-giving, challenging and encouraging. We see this in Jesus’ ministry as he continually saved others through his thought provoking parables and healing miracles.