

Light from Darkness

a sermon preached on the

4th Sunday in Lent

22 March 2009

at

St Luke's in the City, Christchurch

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Lection: Numbers 21: 4-9; John 3: 14-21

As I was preparing today's sermon, it became clear to me that it was necessary to read from verse 1 of Chapter 3, in addition to that as given in the Lectionary, in order to understand more fully the conversation Jesus was having, and also to whom He was speaking.

By doing that, it became clear to me that He was responding to questions from Nicodemus, who was a Pharisee, a man of great standing in the community, and a member of the Jewish Supreme Court. He had great knowledge of religious matters and the law, and yet, he was deeply unfulfilled spiritually, and searching for truth.

We are told that he was impressed by the teaching of Jesus. He wanted to know more, and decided to visit him, but did so under the cover of darkness, which suggests that he did not want to be seen. One can understand that given the fact he was a Pharisee, it was a wonder that he came at all, due to the attitude towards Jesus by the Pharisees and the ruling council. So perhaps we can assume that Nicodemus was a fair and open minded man; a seeker of the truth, and although we can admire these qualities in Nicodemus, the one thing he appeared to be unable to do, was to "come out" and make a full and public statement of faith in Christ. "He visited Jesus under the shadow of darkness." He did not allow the light to enter into his mind and actions.

Jesus tells us that those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen, that their deeds have been done in God.

Normally light is welcome. However, in certain circumstances we might fear it. It can show up not only those things we want to be seen, but also those things we would prefer to keep hidden from others, and, perhaps even from ourselves.

There is a story of a woman who invited a priest to come and bless her home. As she escorted him through the house he noticed that everything was immaculate. Furniture highly polished, floors gleaming, beds neatly made, nothing out of place. He blessed all the rooms, and, as he started to make his way to the basement, the woman said - "Oh, you don't want to go down there." So he left it at that, and on his way home he was wondering why she had refused to take him to the basement. Maybe she would have felt embarrassed if he had seen all the junk which had been put down there over a long period of time.

The parts of ourselves and of Society as a whole, which need the most attention, are the parts we tend to hide. For this reason we don't let the light shine into the dark areas of our lives. We don't find it easy to talk about these things.

We all have such a place as a "basement" area, where old hurts, hates, painful memories and fears are locked away. If we accept the teaching of Christ, and believe in Him, He will, through his gentleness and humility bring us out of our darkness into the light of God's grace and love.

Many people in authority, and many church leaders have brought immense darkness into the lives of others, by the harsh judgemental way they have treated them. We, ourselves can cause darkness in this way.

As a child I was told about a hard and terrifying God, who continually searched for my bad bits, not the good ones; a God of fear rather than of joy. Today, I believe in a God who loves, laughs and weeps, whose light brings healing not hurt, freedom not oppression, life not death.

Those who believe in Christ, will have the light of life, and by living in it, become sources of light to others.

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