

Carol Service 2020: "Cries In The Dark"

13 December 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Opening Prayer

Call to Worship: Isaiah 9:2

Carol: IPH 305 Angels From The Realms Of Glory

Reading: "The Descent Into Darkness" - Genesis 6:11-13; Romans 1:18-25

Carol: IPH 330 O Little Town Of Bethlehem

Reading: "Dwelling In Darkness" - Lamentations 3:1-15

Carol: IPH 324 It Came Upon The Midnight Clear

Reading: "A Light Dawns In The Darkness" - Isaiah 9:1-7

Carol: IPH 336 The First Noel

Reading: "The True Light" - John 1:1-14

Carol: O Holy Night

Reading: "Dayspring - The Rising Sun from Heaven" - Luke 1:67-79

Talk:

Dark

I originally wrote this talk without any reference to (picture of Covid-19) "that which shall not be named", to borrow a Harry Potterism! However, it is the effect Covid-19 has had on us all worldwide that may help us think seriously about the darkness of our world. When the artist Edvard Munch tried to paint what he felt like, this (*The Scream*, 1893) is what he drew! When you see this, you will not be surprised to hear that he was experiencing mental anguish and extreme difficulty in his life. (*Self Portrait*, 1969) This is a self-portrait of Francis Bacon, an Irish born artist, and when you see it, you are not surprised to hear that this genre of art is described as Dark Art.

When we describe something as dark and are speaking metaphorically, we mean the reality that includes, pain, disappointment, evil, cynicism, wrongdoing, and death. So we have:

- the **dark ages**, a period in history deemed to be poor in terms of health, culture and progress
- The **dark net**, a secretive place on the internet where lots of bad stuff happens
- A **dark mood** or being in a **dark place** - sad, depressed, sick, hopeless and trapped
- And the ultimate dark is **death and dying**.

The Christian explanation of such darkness explained in the Bible is clear that this dark reality is because we disobeyed God. Subsequently, the created world, including humanity,

began to experience, as they had been warned, *“the wages of sin which is death.”* The darkness we all experience is part of the reality the Bible calls the Fall. The truth of darkness and death is, at heart, a result of our rebellion against God.

Dawn

We are, as you know, in the depths of winter and the longest night is just about one week away. Creation teaches us every day that to dispel the dark we need the sun to rise. As it rises, it removes darkness, it warms, brings life through its energy, and fills the world with vibrancy and hope. Just as dark is a metaphor for sin and death, so light is a metaphor for forgiveness, hope and life. Our hope in the darkness, seen in creation, is the sun, an outside gift from God. Therefore, this lesson from creation is a picture of our spiritual state and our hope.

Zechariah said, *“because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace”* (Luke 1:78-79).

And the hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” says:

*O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by Thine advent here.
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night and death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

The person spoken about in these words is the Lord Jesus Christ, and He is as He claimed, “the light of the world”! His coming, or advent, was to cheer, to disperse the gloomy clouds and remove the shadow of death. *“In Him was life and that life was the light of man. The light shines in the darkness!”* (John 1:4-5).

(picture of energy saving lightbulb) This is an energy saving light bulb. They are good; however, they can be frustrating because when you turn them on, the light is weak and it takes time for the light to build in intensity. In creation, the dawn light is at first weak, and yet often incredibly beautiful, and it grows as the sun rises in the sky. There was much that was beautiful about the Lord Jesus' birth, with angel choirs and a celestial star, shepherds and surprise, wise men and gifts; but there was much that was still dark, unwelcomed - a dirty stable, political oppression, and obscurity. The light remained relatively hidden for 30 years until the beginning of a ministry that included evidence of light overcoming darkness - sickness healed, storms stilled, evil exorcized, sins forgiven, life after death. And yet, much darkness remained - ignorance, opposition, unbelief. Further light came at the time of greatest darkness, when Jesus died for our sins, not His own, was brutally killed on a Roman cross and, to emphasise and point us to the reality of that time, the sun was eclipsed and darkness came over the whole land. Three days later, at the dawn of the day, a light shone from a grave and Jesus revealed Himself as risen from the dead. Here was the fulfilment of the promise - a light had dawned! Darkness, sin and death had been defeated as Jesus shone in resurrected glory. Jesus is the light; the light has dawned.

Day

A day can be 24 hours and a day can be an expected time - our day will come (*Tiocfaidh ár lá*). The Bible speaks a lot about a day, an event, which is the belief that Jesus comes a second time. This day is variously described as the day of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:6), the last

day (John 6:40), the day of redemption (Eph 4:30), the day of the Lord (2nd Peter 3:10), the day of judgement (1st John 4:17), the great day of God Almighty (Rev 16:14).

The second coming of Jesus, in keeping with the Bible's metaphor of light, reveals His full brightness, total glory, when everything He promised is fulfilled - a new earth and new heaven, a new body and a new society without any sin or darkness, with unhindered access to God and amazing relationship, joy that is undiminished in any way and at any time. The day is the shining brilliance of the glory of the Lord God and His kingdom fully come.

So how do we come out of the dark and into the light of Christ Jesus?

Through believing what we have just heard, by faith, we recognise the darkness and we cry in the dark. We recognise not just sin in the world, but also within us. We recognise our rebellion, our wrong attitudes and lack of love for God and others, and cry out to God for mercy: "I'm sorry, I know I am wrong, will you come to me?" God dealt with the darkness in the life, death and resurrection of His son, Jesus, and by faith in Him we receive forgiveness of our sins and peace with God. Listen to the words of Zechariah again:

"For you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for Him, to give His people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace." (Luke 1:76-79)

As John the Baptist prepared the way for Him, so in declaring to you that Jesus is the light of the world, we declare that darkness has been dispelled, that sin and death have been defeated and our deep desire is that all of us listening to this message will understand the opportunity and hope Jesus gives each one who, by faith, accepts Him as Lord and Saviour.

In Jesus we live every day in the light of His love and grace, and we long for the day when there will be no more sin or death and we will be in His glorious light forever.

He promises that when we cry in the dark he will come.

Carol: IPH 299 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Prayer

Reading: "The Fulfilment - The Glory of God Gives Light" - Revelation 21:22-22:5

Carol: IPH 335 Silent Night, Holy Night

Benediction: Revelation 22:16-17, 20-21