

**Lightness, Darkness & Repentance – Sermon Notes**  
**Sunday 23 January 2011**  
**Nic Denny-Dimitriou**  
**Church of the Ascension**  
**The Anglican Church in Hilton, KZN**

**Readings:** See from Intro below

~~~~~

Prayer for 2011:

“Dear God

This year please give me a thin body and a fat bank account.  
 And please: Don’t mix them up like you did last year!”

~~~~~

3 of today’s 4 Scripture Readings have a common theme, in their references to darkness and light – MAIN POINTS FROM EACH READING:

**Isaiah 9: 1-4 (should also read vv 6 & 7)**

A reading we often also have at Christmas

A GREAT light has dawned

Upon those in darkness

Verse 6 (read) – this is no ordinary “light” being referred to!

**Psalm 27**

Said a portion at start of service

Also with a focus on light: Worship God who lights up our life

**Matthew 4: 12-23**

Beginning of Jesus’ ministry

Fulfilment of prophecy of Isaiah

Jesus quotes those words

A great light upon people in darkness

Jesus calling people to follow him – and some of the first of his disciples are called and named, twelve of whom become a close-knit group with Jesus and work alongside him, and they later come to be called “12 Apostles”

Themes of light and dark not unique to Christianity or the faith of Jesus’ earthly community, the Hebrews

Common to other religions

Figures of speech

Common to humanity

Darkness = absence of light

Some good and wonderful things happen in darkness or minimal light

Romantic dinners and moments of intimacy (candle light)

Movies – even if that’s watching light flickering on a screen ☺

Moonlight picnics (oops – perhaps too much light)

Watching the stars (aah, again, little night lights in the sky)

Sleep in a darkened room – aah, that’s a good use for darkness!

But darkness is mostly understood as negative

Terrors, not only for little children

Security fears

Many horrible things – no need to mention them

Figures of speech – “Darkest Africa” with colonial stereotypes and racial undertones; “dark underworld of crime”; “deep and dark secrets”; “dark forboding sky / storm” ...

Less horrific, but negative too – what psychologists refer to as “our shadow side” – referred to also by spiritual writers since the days of the early church until today, even if terminology used is different

Light = mostly positive

Daylight

Sunshine

The things we can do in light and with light

What happens to people who don’t get enough light (depression is real)

Human eye drawn to light; “cats eyes” in the road – very helpful esp. on a dark and misty night in Hilton! Also the reason for vehicle lights on, day and night, summer and winter, as per several countries

But we also have the following figures of speech: “Shine a light on corruption and crime”, Exposure;

And light that is too bright can be dazzling

Biblical Imagery:

God created light – and everything else continued after that

Darkness associated with human sin, failure, hiding from God, hiding from truth

Darkness associated with chaos

God’s Spirit brought order out of chaos

God is Light – in Him there is no darkness!

Darkness – figurative concept of walking in it:

Lost, wandering, no clarity of values or purpose in life, no direction

Even if want to get smart and say now we have technology, now we have a GPS device to get us where we need to go even in a strange city in the middle of the night – you still know what is meant in a figurative sense

Very useful biblical imagery, that we take both literally and figuratively; play around with concepts; understand what the biblical writers meant – and what Jesus meant in referring to himself! For if Jesus used such terminology, and it is largely a universal terminology and with universal applications, then it's both useful and necessary to consider it. Have elaborated on it, so that when dealing with light and dark (which is every day), it may also draw our attention to The Light of Christ.

Darkness and Light in all of us

Reflect the image of our maker – therefore Light

Made to “live in the light” without shame or need to hide thoughts, actions and intentions

But sin / personal choice to live differently from God's perfect requirements / human weakness – cause us also to live with darkness

Moon: A dark side which cannot be seen from earth, because of the way the moon orbits the earth, always showing the same “face” towards earth

“We are like the moon. All of us have a dark side that nobody ever sees.”

[Unless, like the Apollo astronauts, you somehow get to go around that dark side]

### **HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO THESE THEMES?**

A number of questions

No answer to me / anyone else unless you later want to talk to someone

Light – welcome it?

Comfortable to have God's “torchlight” (Yes and No - elaborate)

Comfort and awkwardness (elaborate)

Not hiding in shame

God's unconditional love

Obedience – continuing to live in ways that honour God

Darkness

Shame

Walking in darkness

No clear direction for life's values, purpose

“... We have lost our way in a fog of busyness and forgetfulness.

We have strayed from Your road, Lord, we have followed false guides.”

## **Repentance**

Turn from darkness to light – clear wording of our Baptism service

Not just any light – but the Light of Jesus Christ, as one who follows Jesus Christ

Major repentance – life turnaround / after major destructiveness of sin

Daily repentance / repentance of the moment – prayers, ask forgiveness

Liturgy – wonderful words of expression together of our human condition which is less than Holy God's perfection, so we acknowledge this, and we acknowledge our need of forgiveness in both general and specific ways, and are reassured of God's love and forgiveness

Useful reminder from the Gospels: Jesus, post-resurrection, dealing with Peter who betrayed him – yet Jesus made it clear he forgave Peter, reinstated their friendship and gave him even greater responsibility than before

## **Meditation and Prayer, moment of quiet**

Jesus, the Light of the World, shines the Light of God on all humanity. Even a small torchlight in a great darkness enables us to see our way, get our bearings; even if it seems dark all around, a small amount of focussed light can be enough! Sometimes our lives are so cluttered that Jesus' light is only like the dawn light, slowly and faintly penetrating the darkness of the night. But in time, it becomes like the full-shining sun – this, after all, is no ordinary light, it is The Light of Christ.

When we are embarrassed by how we have treated others, God invites us to seek the face of grace. When we regret foolish words that cannot be taken back, or foolish actions that cannot be undone, God reminds us of his offer of forgiveness. We are reluctant to admit all the ways we have failed to be God's faithful people.

Lord: You have promised to be our Light, so lead us from the shadows of our sin and silliness. You have promised to be our salvation, so set us free to explore the depths of your heart. You have promised to lead us into your kingdom, so show us how to join hands with one another and to follow our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.