

Darkness - the often avoided reminder

Advent -> Love

Speaking to the serpent,

Genesis 3:15 "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Because **love** the head of the serpent is crushed.

Advent - the purposeful recognition of waiting.

In God's design

Genesis 1:4-5 God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.

In our waiting darkness is a reminder.

Our world is broken. Because of sin we are separated from our Creator. This is the plight of humanity.

People put a lot of promise in self!

But in the trenches of actual living we see the fractures and crumbling of our world.

Darkness is not something to ignore.

- It is something to press into.
- It is a reminder of the failure and heartbreak caused by people. No one is immune.
- This brokenness (darkness) must be acknowledged and grieved.
- Loss is, in fact, terrible. It can not be reversed.

St John of the Cross (16th century Spanish monk) -> "dark night of the soul".

Without acknowledging the darkness we aren't preaching the gospel we are simply asking people to believe in an illusion.

It is in our pain and despair, our confusion and feelings of abandonment, that we will discover God is at work. surface (where we try to keep things safe).

At the surface we may ask, Why? or How do I fix this?

But as we drill down the question changes, "What is God saying to me in this?"

We have made darkness an enemy, but we must begin to see darkness as a friend.

Will you suppress it (the dark night of the soul) or will you learn from the gift that it is?

"There are some men and women who have lived forty or fifty years in the world and have had scarcely an hour's discourse with their hearts all the while." ~ John Flavel (17th Century Presbyterian pastor)

Moving toward the darkness teaches us.

- to be free from false securities and pride.
- to see the unique mission of God in each of our journeys.

The dark night exposes our fear.

The dark night is a place for God to demonstrate that he is indeed the great Physician (Luke 5:31).

The darkness reveals just how fragile we are.

The darkness reveals the subtleties of our idols.

The darkness reveals opportunity.

- An opportunity for freedom.
- An opportunity to break the chains of fear, loneliness, and hopelessness.

We can't ignore the darkness or pretend it doesn't exist.

Walter Brueggemann (OT Scholar) describes this as "psychological inauthenticity".

Everything looks good on the outside (honestly, it looks to good), but on the inside love is twisted to be selfish, contrived, and contingent.

Mission deteriorates into manipulation, and moralistic pep rallies.

We must embrace the dark.

Amos 5:18-20 Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light, 19 as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him. 20 Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?

This is the mood of Advent. These are the experiences of waiting!

We are in a time of in-between and safety is an illusion.

- You think you have avoided a lion only to encounter a bear.
- You run into the safety of your home only to be bit by a serpent.

Questions pile on top of questions:

Is COVID just the beginning of an ever increasing, longer lasting cycle of pandemics?

How do I make sense of my trauma?

Why have we experienced this mis-carriage?

What is going on with the earth? More severe weather (hurricanes, heat, snow, etc.).

Pick a topic - disease, hunger, violence, exploitation none of which take a break.

What does the church do in the time of the in-between?

This is why the prophet Amos continues with this admonishment.

Amos 5:21-24 "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. 22 Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. 23 Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. 24 But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Your worship is hollow until justice and righteousness flows out of you like a mighty, abundant stream. (Love)

Advent demands that we wrestle with the hard and painful questions.

If we don't our faith is too shallow to survive.

Philippians 1:9 It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and discernment.

"When we're drowning we need a lifeline, and our lifeline in grief cannot be mere optimism that maybe our circumstances will improve because we know that may not be true. We need practices that teach us to walk with God in the crucible of our own fragility." ~ Tish Harrison Warren

Advent is this sort of practice!

In the sacredness of Jesus' birth the serpent struck. (Darkness)

Matthew 2:16-18 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. **17** Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

18 "A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."

We must be a church who practices talking about our faith, growing in discernment, studying God's word seriously, and teaching the next generation (our children) what it truly means to be a disciple (Christian) as a sojourner on the narrow path.

Belief and Suffering

Philippians 1:29-30 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, **30** engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.
Experiencing darkness in our waiting.

There is a large difference between optimism and hope.

Optimism - lives in the denial of real facts.

Hope - persists in spite of the very real facts because it is anchored in something / someone greater than our circumstances.

John the Baptist -> he spoke hope, not optimism. "The kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Matthew 3:12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

The dark night of the soul invites us to compassion.

The mission of Jesus, the birth of Jesus, is motivated by compassion.

But Jesus has come to set us free.

The darkness contained in each of our souls is an opportunity, not an obstacle.

"Compassion does not ignore the truth. It enters into it, wrestles with it. It requires a solidity and strength of relationship with others which endures even in times of extraordinary difficulty." ~ Chuck DeGroat

Advent is about clinging to the love and promises of God. It is about living in the time in-between.

Mark 13:34-37 It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. **35** Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— **36** lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. **37** And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."

At the end of all things, night will be no more.

Revelation 22:5 And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Jesus is the light that darkness cannot overcome.

Prayer of Compline (Completion)

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake. *Amen.*