

*Come holy spirit, take my words and think through them, take our minds and think through them, take our hearts and plant in them, the love of Jesus.*

It's that time of year when the nights close in around us. When the darkness comes earlier and earlier. Where, perhaps, you gather around a fire, and are glad of the electric lights in your home. Isn't it wonderful to have a light in the darkness? There's something comforting about it. Something that makes us feel safer, and warmer somehow.

It's easy to forget that when we close the door when we get home at night that there is a world out there, in the darkness. It is oh so easy to avoid the news, and find enjoy our lives. And Why not? There is nothing wrong with enjoying the comfort that curling up in front of a warm fire brings.

Though for some of us, when we close the door, it's not that comforting. When we close that door, the electric light brings no comfort to our darkness.

Looking around at the world, it is easy to see that it is not the happiest of place.

*Insert news stories here:*

This past week has been remembrance week, and at the same time there was news of more deaths in Afganistan. There is terrible oppresion in Zimbabwe, that we forget about now it's not so much in the news, there are children in orphanages in Africa where they hardly get any kind of comfort, people dying by their thousands of AIDS in africa.

Not a very comforting world. It seems, on the face of it, to be full of suffering. We were told to expect it. Our reading today tell us that there will be war. Nation will rise up against nation, there will be earthquakes and famines. There will be great pain.

What a world we live in. What a world we find ourselves in. Dark, and forboding. It somehow doesn't match with the view of the loving God. These are the big things in the world, and looking at it with the large lense, it is really difficult to see where God could be in it.

At this point, perhaps, your expecting some answer. A wonderfully crafted theology that allows me to tell you the reasons why all this happens.

*Pause*

I don't have one.

*Pause*

I don't have one, but what I do have the wonderful promises of Christ, recorded in the Gospel Accounts of his life. He promises that he will never leave us, perhaps the most famous way is his promise in the Gospel of John,

*I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. (John 18-20)*

*Pause.*

Perhaps the work God is difficult to see in some of these situations because He is greater than our vision of the world. Imagine your looking at a picture, perhaps Monet's Waterloo bridge, or really, any painting by the impresionists. The closer you stand to it, all you see is just an explosion of colour, with no real definition. The only way to really get the full view of the picture is to step back. When we look at the world, we are standing far too close to the wonderful picture that God is painting. We are standing too close because we ourselves are in the painting, part of it, one of the exquisite brush strokes.

So if we can't stand far enough back to see God in the Suffering, perhaps He is easier to see when we get a little closer to things. Right into the very heart of the suffering. God is in that surprising act of kindness. That unexpected hand offering help, and comfort. It's in the people that risk their own lives to save others. God is right there with those that suffer.

*Pause*

Sometimes when we close that door, and our electric light brings us no comfort it's because of the darkness within us. Not all the time, but sometimes we find a sorrow, a worry, or tragedy. Something that makes us feel so alone. We feel that it doesn't matter how much we call out to God, there is no answer.

There is a short story, who's author is lost in the midst of time. It's title is footprints, and many of you may be familiar with the story. It's about a man who walks along the beach of life with Christ by his side. At the end of his journey he turns back and looks at the footprints he has left in the sand, and he turns to Christ and says "When life was good, you walked by my side, and I see both our footprints in the sand. When times were hard, I can see only one set of footprints. Where were you?" Christ turns to the man, and says "That was when I carried you".

*Short pause.*

Often in our darkness we can't see the wood for the trees. Finding our way out of it on our own is very difficult. When you are moving in the darkness you move slowly, carefully, afraid of making the wrong move. We trust only our senses, and these are limited. We rely only on what we can touch or feel, and we peer into the darkness trying to make sense of the jumble of images that we can see. Jumping at our own shadow. We often feel that all we need is a little light, something to show us the way.

We may feel that God does not answer, but we are not alone. Christ is carrying us. He is right there, with us. Holding us up, carrying us in ways that we may not perhaps notice. The smile of a stranger, a piece of good advice from a friend, a surprising set of coincidences that show us that something outside of us is on our side, that unexpected strength when we feel we have used all of our own, and can't work out how it is we are still going.

We are still going because Christ is with us. Emmanuel. God with us, working through us. Part of the promise of Prophets that we read in Mathew.

*All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the LORD through the prophet: "Look, the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel" which means, "God is with us." (Mt. 1:22-23)*

No matter how dark it gets, He will always be a light for us. Christ promised us that he would not

leave us, and he hasn't. He is with us, he works in us, and through us with the Holy Spirit. At the same time, we dwell within Christ. Through prayer we enter into a conversation that leads us, inch by inch, to being changed.

Christ is the Light to our Feet. When we trust, and have faith in Christ, even in the darkest times, we will find our feet being guided. Sometimes, of course, we may not see it, but we have to trust that we are being carried. That the light will guide us out of the darkness.

The picture here (*Point to the Picture of the Light of the World*) shows Christ as the light bearer. You can see it better as you come up for communion. In the picture he has brought the light of the world, but he's standing at the door, at our door. The only trouble is, you may notice, that on this door there is no handle on the outside. The only way for the light of the world to enter into us, to bring the light to our feet is for us to open the door, and let him in.

*Pause.*

As the winter draws in around us, we will all be glad of those electric lights. We will all be glad of the light of the fire. We will all be glad of the light of the television. Yet surrounded by all this generated light, let us not lose sight of the light that penetrates even our deepest darkness.

*Pause, with feeling.*

Christ will walk with us, through darkness and through light, so let us rejoice in him in the light that we may confidently lean on him in the dark.

Amen.