

The Light of Christ Makes All the Difference and We are its Bearers

Candlemas

2 February 2020

Reading: Luke 2:22-40

Some places desperately need light. Rosemary and I did the rail trail in Central Otago. There was this one tunnel, beautifully constructed in brick, which unbeknownst to me gently curved toward the light at the end. As you bike into it the first thing that strikes you is that it is 5 degrees cooler than outside, and then the darkness hits you. Total darkness like you have never seen before, if you get what I mean. I naively thought that if I just kept my eyes focused on the light at the end, I'd be fine. In the meantime, I turned on my headlamp but that made no difference. Then I turned on my cell phone, still no difference. The total darkness swallowed up everything I threw at it. In the end I walked slowly and carefully right into the side of the tunnel almost knocking myself out! Some places desperately need light.

This day goes by the name of Candlemas, a celebration of light. It marks the occasion of Jesus being brought to the temple and the proclamation by Simeon that this child will be light for the whole world. His parents must have really loved him because both of them go. Mary needed to and they do everything required of them. They are rich in love but poor in money they can only offer a couple of pigeons. These sacrifices are a sign of gratitude that all life comes from God. There are a number of pigeons around the church which the builders would quite happily offer as sacrifices too!

Mary and Joseph are welcomed by two representatives of the Hebrew people, Simeon and Anna. These two experience the great joy of seeing the fulfilment of the promise that God would send his chosen one to redeem the people. Simeon gives the canticle so beloved by Anglicans that we have sung it for hundreds of years and which we use when someone is dying, "Lord now you let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have

seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people, light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel.”

It's so typical of Luke to faithfully record the words of the 84-year-old Anna. In his Gospel, as in the life of Jesus, men and women play an equal part. In the temple in Jerusalem that day Light had come.

In a moment we will light candles to remind us that Christ is the Light of the World and that no darkness in our world can ever put it out.

But what difference could lighting candles possibly make in our world anyway. Is it just wishful thinking?

On a Monday evening in 1982 the vicar of St Nicholas Church East Germany started prayers for peace. Like most things in parish life it started pretty small just a handful of people praying for the nation and for freedom. Few realized that God had something huge in store for them. Each Monday night the few that gathered lit candles to show that Christ was the light not just of their nation but the whole world. Slowly over the next seven years the number of people coming to the church to pray grew. Then the authorities began to take notice. Pastor Christian, the vicar, was taken aside by the secret police and told to stop. It was terrifying he recounted but we kept going. We gained strength from each other. By 1989 the army put barricades at the end of the street to stop worshippers coming. This had the opposite effect. Crowds of 70,000 had started to come to pray for peace. Each was given a candle. As Pastor Christian said, it guaranteed a peaceful protest because you can't throw stones with a candle in your hands. He recalled that he almost lost his nerve when a number of doctors came to church one Sunday and said they had a special ward at the hospital for the gunshot victims when the police opened fire next time they met.

Mention of the secret police reminds me of a village in Austria that was famous for its clocks. Each year they held a special march by of all the clockmakers. In procession the clock makers would march tick, tock, tick, tock.

But one clockmaker marched by his own rules. Tick, tick, tick he said as he marched. So, the police took him into custody, shone a bright light on his face and said, “We have ways of making you tock!”

Anyway, back to the story. The next Monday was to the 40th anniversary of the GDR East Germany. The president announced he would use quote “whatever force was necessary to close down the church and the protests.”

Later a secret police officer wrote: “We were ready for anything except people armed with candles. We simply didn’t know what to do so we withdrew the tanks and the crowd, now 200,000 strong, marched on the Berlin Wall”. What happened next Pastor Christian described as a miracle. The crowd began pulling down the Berlin Wall bit by bit. No shots were fired. It was a peaceful revolution.

Today you and I will be given a candle and the invitation to carry the light of Christ out into our world. Where is God calling you to take his light? Where is God’s peaceful revolution of love needed in our community, in our world?

Like that tunnel I found myself in, so many places in our world desperately need light. Let’s boldly take the light of Christ into dark places this week. And we can be sure that it will make a powerful difference for good.