Minister's Message

November 2021

Dear Friends,

Advent is now on the horizon as the November days move swiftly on. In this short space between now and then, I’d just like to reflect perhaps a little more deeply on the meaning of this coming season. Certainly, we will celebrate each of its four weeks. Over the past few years, in what seems to have become more and more a universal Christian tradition, we have our Advent wreath that helps us to mark the weeks of waiting; that mixture of solemnity and of the joyful anticipation of Christmas.

In the high theology of the Gospel of John, Christ, the Word (the Logos) came into the world. He was described as the true light who gives light to everyone (1:9).

He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognise him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. (1:12-13)

Advent then, is the waiting for the birth of the Christ child. Christmas is its culmination, the arrival of the light of the world. He is the light that the darkness cannot overcome. In this story we are reminded of an older truth recounted in the first chapter of Genesis; the creation story where in the beginning there was nothing except darkness, but the Spirit of God moving upon the face of the water.

Then God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. And God saw the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light 'day' and the darkness 'night.'(1:3-5)

What we can read here is that right at the beginning, in this first chapter of Genesis, God, through the Word, said, 'Let there be light.' According to John (1:2), the Word existed in the beginning with God and that God through the Word created everything.

Back to Genesis. When God saw the light and saw that it was good, he separated the light from the darkness. He did not banish the darkness, but he gave it its place in the scheme of things. Therefore, the darkness exists for a purpose. Moreover, a realistic view of the inner life will show that in each of us too, there exists a certain darkness. Try as we might I think we will find that we cannot altogether banish this darkness, this shadow side of our personality. It is actually part of who we are. The wholeness we must seek can be found only by integrating all that we are into a oneness, a unified singularity. Once we can acknowledge and understand ourselves in the totality of our being, the good bits and perhaps those other bits we don't like, those bits we would not readily disclose or acknowledge, we can find that wholeness. On these terms, we can be at peace if we can begin by accepting ourselves as we really are. Another word for this is: resignation. It might not sound like very much, but it's a good place to be.

For example, to many people, anger is a taboo emotion, but it's only an emotion and it exists for a reason. Fear is another emotion that we often struggle with. But anger and fear, at a primal level, arise from instincts that have helped us to survive as a species. The days of Advent are the darkest days of the year, but they help to give emphasis to this waiting for the true light that will come into the world. This waiting, this solemnity, indeed, this resignation heralds the coming and comfort of the light, like the light that may accompany an awakening from troubled sleep. The light that may bring order from chaos, the light that will allow us to put things in perspective, and to see things as they really are or a Jesus said:

And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. (John 8:32)

Christ came into the world to reveal the unfathomable depths of God's love and to show that it is only through his grace that we are saved. We associate the darkness with evil and holiness with the light, but as we have seen, God gave the darkness its place in the scheme of things and necessarily so. Evil is really disequilibrium, the opposite of God's ordering:

And this judgement is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins may be exposed. (John 3:19-20)

My best wishes as always.

Bob.