

28th January 2024, Candlemas, Eucharist
Malachi 3: 1-5, Hebrews 2: 14-end, Luke 2: 22-40
Father Timothy Carroll

Norway is sometimes referred to as the land of the midnight sun. One of the very few locations where sunset merges into sunrise, with no darkness in between. In the middle of the night when the sky is normally a blanket of darkness, the sun can clearly still be seen. Of course, you can benefit from the extended day but also have to adapt new ways of sleeping, likewise in the perpetual darkness that comes 6 months later it also has to be adapted to stave off the psychological effects of no daylight. Adapting to light and darkness is also a challenge in Christianity.

Often, we think of light as good and darkness as bad. Whereas there is often an interplay between the two with each concept holding the potential for the other. Within mystic traditions, they refer to the darkness of God being an excess of light – a metaphor for the incomprehensible, the mysterious and a place of intimate communication. There are two traditions of knowing and unknowing in theology – light and dark, positive, and negative theology. Although the darkness can sometimes feel too risky, the unknowingness of God, although if we talk about light we need to think about darkness. In much of the world's art, the sun and the moon are pictured together as sacred symbols. The solar light gives glaring brightness but paradoxically creates defined shadows. While light orders and brings clarity are good, it can also give us an arrogance about that very order and clarity. The very sun that illuminates also blinds, dehydrates, and kills when we get too much of it.

Last week we celebrated the feast of the conversion of Paul. We sometimes forget that he was blinded by the light of Christ. What is brought into the light can be difficult to deal with. All things on earth are a mixture of darkness and light. When we idolize things as totally good or condemn otherness as totally bad, we get ourselves in trouble. Jesus simplifies this task by saying: "God alone is good".

But of course, we know that there is also an unwanted darkness. Loss, suffering, pain, and abandonment. And our own inner darkness at times which causes us to behave in ways that we regret. Mystic Thomas Merton who often advocated for understanding the darkness of faith knew that not all darkness was affirming. He said to his confessor 'I am sorry and ashamed of the way that I trust my own darkness rather than his infinite light'

The feast of Candlemas brings an end to the season of epiphany with the story of the presentation of Christ in the temple and the fascination of the details of old Simeon and Anna. Simeon refers to this child as a light of revelation to the Gentiles. How are we to understand this particular idea of light in this morning's passage?

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

What light do we encounter this morning. A light of revelation to the Gentiles
The Gentiles. The outsider invited into the circle of light. The gentiles, those who don't belong to the people of God. It is a promise for those who walk in darkness. For those who do not feel like they belong. There are many reasons why someone may think that they do not belong. Not enough money, the wrong ethnicity, you don't know what to do when you get into a church, the wrong kind of love, the eccentrics, the forgotten. Or like Simeon and also Anna, those who are old.

Where in this festival, we are to recognise this light being for those who do not belong, that Christ brings all into the light of his love. As we think about light we must think at this time to recognise the darkness of our minds and our hearts and in our relationships. Where we ignore, shut out often because of fear, and we let the darkness in. We don't see them anymore. In this Candlemas service, these individuals and groups have the light of Christ shining upon them. There is enough light for everyone.

Rowan Williams talks of the inexhaustible light. The fire that is kindled by fire. When one candle lights another, it is not that there is less of the first. Fire goes on generating fire, light kindle light and flame kindles flame. When God sets the world on fire with his love. When God gives of himself. In Christ, in the resurrection and the Holy Spirit. There isn't any less of God. When God gives himself in light, his light does not diminish. Often, we let the darkness in, and our lights flicker and can go out. Which is why we are reminded this morning that we need to continue to come to the light of Christ. Which does not flicker, this light does not lessen. A love which goes on kindling. It continues to give. We seek this light, this warmth, this love at this festival. In our lives and in the lives of others. Who feel like they don't belong.

As we reflect on this incident in the temple. Of Jesus being presented in the temple. We ask for light of God's love to kindle in our hearts and our communities.

Amen