

God likes to change things.

I used to watch the news – I used to read the newspaper. I found myself getting depressed, and I found I wasn't really reading the paper, as the stories were all basically the same, just the names and places changed. They talk about death and sadness and rough times (the one exception being sports).

Rough times (examples):

- physical: illness, sickness, hardship, etc.
- mental: mental illness, foggy brain, trauma, dementia / Alzheimer's, etc.
- social: rejection from society, not function well in society, stress / anxiety from being with others, being bullied / picked on, etc.
- economic: barely making ends meet, job loss or potential, even if have job may not be bringing in enough, etc.

Seem to snowball – a ripple effect. For example:

- it is well documented that cases of abuse go up when people are stressed economically due to job loss or lowered pay, or any kind of trauma really. Cases of abuse and mistreatment have risen in Fort McMurray since the fire of a year ago.
- It is well documented that mental illness and disfunction go up when people suffer abuse.
- It is well documented that social rejection increases with mental illness and disfunction.
- It is well documented that people receive lower pay or even job loss with social marginalization or rejection ...

This definitely can be a vicious circle...

However, we don't walk in that path – we don't join that circle. For, our God likes to change things. He doesn't like vicious circles, and our God is a God who intervenes.

We see a glimpse of this in our first reading. Saul was still king – Samuel was doing an act of treason. God chose one who had the same values (heart) as Him, not who Samuel / society thought was best. While the old still held sway (Saul), God started a new thing (David).

Jesus demonstrates this in our story as told by John.

He met a man who had always been blind. Jesus declares to His disciples, “this man was born blind so that God's works may be revealed in Him.” In other words, that the man may be blessed, and people see the power of God at work. He continued “I am the light of the world. I have come to judge, that those who don't see may see, and those who see (or think they do) may be blind.”

Jesus heals the blind man, and this has a curious consequence: the man is kicked out of his synagogue (in other words, he is rejected by his community), but he is accepted by Jesus. Just like us, He is accepted by our Lord.

As we are reminded in Psalm 23:

Our Lord protects us, cares for us, seeks us out, provides for us all we need. We need desire or covet nothing, for God provides all we need! Our Lord guides us in His way.

Though things turn dark, even if we are surrounded by death and destruction, even in the midst of that vicious cycle we talked about: even then, we need not fear evil, for our Lord is with us.

His rod and staff comfort us. In other words, His sharp raps and quick tugs put us right again (what sheep and shepherd are actually like).

In the midst of all that would do us harm, our Lord feeds us, cares for us, loves us.

The goodness of God, our Lord's relentless love that never quits: it is with us, and we shall live with Him forever.

Amen and Amen.

Then we come to Ephesians, and we have a bit of a twist to our understanding.

Paul doesn't write that "we went through the darkness" or "we endured the darkness" (though that may be true). Paul writes we WERE darkness. We were the darkness! We DID the evil, the hurt, the harm: we were the darkness. Think on that a little bit – are there ways that we have contributed to darkness?

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But now, through the love of Jesus, through the great Shepherd coming and lifting us up, we – are – light. So, as Paul says, let us live as light. Let us do what is good, true, right, and pleasing to the Lord.

Jesus is the light of the world. In Jesus, with Jesus, we are the light of the world. Like Jesus, we are here to reveal God's glory.

How can we help? How can we be light? How can we show God's works?

Do you know of anyone who is in the darkness, who perhaps is the darkness?

We can do some definite things (so here is your homework :)):

- 1.) Pray for them.
- 2.) Pray for Jesus to guide us in how to respond.
- 3.) Do what Jesus guides us to.

... and that's as complicated as it needs to be. Try that! Even if for just one person this week. Try it, and see where Jesus walks with you.

Paul said: "For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light- for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord."

You were darkness, but you are no longer – you are light. Lent is a period of time where we walk through darkness, together. You may be experiencing darkness, even living through it right now. Every dark cloud does end, eventually. Every dark experience does quit, finally. And you are not at home there, because you are no longer of the dark: you are light – the light of the world. The cycle is broken.

No matter how dark things may feel, our Lord is our God who provides. We will praise His name.

No matter how dark things may feel, we are conquerors and co-heirs with Christ: We will praise His name.

No matter how dark things may feel, our Lord is our God who provides: We have reason to worship.

And like Jesus, as we reveal God's works to all who are in darkness, to all who *are* darkness: that is our praise, that is our worship – and it is *most* pleasing to our God and Saviour. Let us walk this path together. Amen!