



SIEBENQUELL

Deserts die at the oasis: Resisting resignation
We say to the darkness,
We beg to differ



Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead thou me on;
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead thou me on.

J. H. Newman

How many hopes and fears are captured in those lines? They appeal to us because they express the deepest truth about us, namely, that we are afraid of the dark. That is a hardly surprising, for who knows what horrors await us in the dark? The darkness speaks of our cold and barren loneliness. We can rage against the dying of the light and refuse to go gently into the night, but go we must whether resistant, resigned or reluctant. And therein lays our deepest fear of the dark: we cannot control the darkness. We cannot make it stop, it does not heed our command to cease. Our power cannot force it to pass the quicker or come more rapidly to an end. Isaiah describe sit like this: »A people that walked in darkness...«

Not even the poetic eloquence of Isaiah cannot dull the edge of this helplessness. We feel the cutting fury of the darkness that surrounds us when illness plagues our loved ones and depression finds a home in us. There is the darkness of the fatigue of the working poor who struggle to stay afloat, but have no hope of getting ahead. There is a darkness that crushes the unemployed person who discovers that great ability and consistent talent do not overcome the liability of age at the job interview. The darkness has power over us, for we cannot escape its long and unyielding grasp. At Christmas time we carry shields of tinsel, but they crumble. Our pine tree ramparts are breached. The armour of money, gift certificates and appetizingly packaged greed does not keep the sting of the dark from our hearts. The mind numbing shopping rush cannot deter the deep shadows of darkness.

Yet, we are afraid to stop, afraid to get off the Christmas carousel. We plunge ourselves anew into this maddening press; yet for all our ceaseless pursuits and chasing, the darkness is no lighter.

The God comes and changes everything with a true alternative. On a wall in Queen Street West in Toronto that was some graffiti that read:

When we light a candle
at midnight -
We say to the darkness,
We beg to differ.

That is precisely what we celebrate. Peering into the midnight gloom of humanity, God ignited a light called Jesus. In doing so our God has said to the darkness: I beg to differ.

But what a light he holds up in our night. A light of human flesh and human vulnerability. He sends us a kindly light to lead us home, and that light helps us to realize that our home is none other than God's embrace. »We have seen a great light« foretold by Isaiah, and in Christ we now it to be true that »a light has shone upon us«.

The words of Titus come alive: »God's grace has been revealed«. But this revelation has taken place in vulnerable flesh. It is flesh that manifests the glorious God who has drawn near to us in Christ. This is the same flesh that glistens with sweat when it toils, is torn with ease by steel, groans with weariness, aches from burden, weakens with age, is ravaged by the elements and knows cold, deprivation, homelessness and fear. Yet, it is through this flesh that God speaks unexpected and unlikely words of love to us.

Jesus is God's message to the darkness: I beg to differ. Jesus reveals to us a humanity that I repeatedly saw with my own eyes during this past year. In a world where too many ball their fists, I saw how people loving stroked a hand cramped into a fist and stretched every finger for hours, to restore muscle and strength. My ears heard how the groaning of a human being helps build the kingdom of God, because others heard every moan and refused to turn a deaf ear. Indeed, my eyes have seen the salvation of our God in a humanity that reveals God's closeness in comforting touch where others flinch back, in sustained, preserving, stubborn love that does not leave the side of the other, despite of all the exhaustion, desperation and sadness. Here, I took the wisdom of the Magi to heart. I bent my knee. I offer homage. I do not need a crèche.

What shepherds saw and angels sang of, we have meet in the unsolicited hugs of a child that say to the gruelling day: I beg to differ. Friendship's embrace reminds institutional indifference: I beg to differ. The spouse's kiss, the hand held through hell, the patient waiting, and the tender caress: all of these say to the darkness: we beg to differ. And every time we do this, the desert dies at the oasis.

Therefore I say to you: allow yourselves to be touched by God in the holy night. Be touched by Christ in the sacred darkness. That this might happen we must seek deeper, beyond banquets, boxes, baskets and bows. We must pierce through them all and toward the God who holds us by the hand and embraces us in the flesh. We who are afraid of the dark have been met by a God who tenderly enfolds our brittle hearts in the endearing warmth of a child.

And this is truly Good News. For outside the glow of candle and crèche, the darkness awaits once more. Here we have been prepared for that darkness. Therefore, go back to your darkness! Seek out the deep shadows about you! Face the blackest part of your night! And then whisper into its already broken power: I beg to differ.

Dedicated to Carmen and all her beloved.

Erik Riechers SAC

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