

Lord Jesus Christ
By the power of your presence
Open the mind of God to us
That in your light we may see light
And in your strength be strong
Amen.

This week it's been cold and frosty and I have to admit I have been struggling with feeling cold after the summer in London. I think I have turned into a softy and will need thermals earlier this year. But with cold and clear skies comes a spectacular show in Dalmellington. Being far away from towns and lights has its advantages and on Wednesday night we were treated to this display: this is the milky way in all its glory.

It made me think of

“ The light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not overcome it“

As we look to the sky we realise that we are never left in darkness and that in the beginning, God created the heavens as earth and soon after he created light, so we could marvel at the beauty of the world around us and even in the darkness there would always be chinks of light.

Light was a high priority for God for he himself was light.

John's Gospel tells the story of Jesus, Jesus who was with God from the beginning sent to the world to reconcile the world to God. To be light in the world. To testify to the world the truth about God. His testimony that would touch the human heart.

Jesus story would give people the opportunity to know who he was, where he came from.

How many times do we get asked where do we come from and who we are related to?

It's how people try and gauge what kind of person we are and what reputation we may have.

It would have been the same for Jesus.

He spoke often of his Father and where he came from and tried to point people to him. Jesus lived his life around other people, being with them and living his life as an example to them. The story of his life-giving those around him light to live life in its fullness.

John's gospel asks three questions:

Who is Jesus, where is he from, what is his mission?

Our verse today helps us to think through these questions.

“ I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life.”

I like to walk in my time off, it reconnects me to God, I like the quiet and stillness and I can think and get ideas for sermons. I love to walk the coast, my favourite walk involves going past the lighthouse at Turnberry.

Lighthouses beaming light out to sea, to warn folks of the danger of the rocks and coast. Standing in all weathers shining their light. Saving lives of those who trust in the light from the lighthouse.

Jesus tells us that he is the light of the world. Whoever follows will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

If we see Jesus as our lighthouse, his light shining for us to follow on our journey, warning us of danger and destruction and saving our lives. Standing strong for us in all weathers and all situations. The light of our lives.

John tells us that Jesus came to bring light and life to the world. So with light that we find in Christ not just to keep for ourselves but we are told to let that light shine so that all might see.

When we live in the light of Christ, the world around us sees a difference because our lives will shine bright with the light of Christ. The mission of Christ was to spread the light through this world by using people like us.

It's not just one light that has to shine in the world, Jesus calls us all to shine His light. Imagine if we could see all Christians in the world and see them like lighthouses shining in the world and making a difference to those around them. Warning folks of the dangers of life, keeping them safe and point to the one light that of Christ.

It's what Jesus calls us to.

Our response to following Jesus and knowing what that means for our lives is to point others towards him. Our story tells his story and our lives shine his light.

This verse sits between the passage on the woman caught in adultery, where we hear

“ Then neither do I condemn you, Go now and leave your life of sin.”

And at verse 30 of chapter 8

“ Even as he spoke many people put their faith in him”

By being with people and speaking and living among them, Jesus was able to teach and show a new way for people to live. To break down barriers and traditions and show them the way God had planned for the world, not the way the world planned. Jesus was pointing out the ways of the world did not shine God's light and it was only by believing in Jesus that the true light would shine in people.

When folks saw the true light, new life and life in its fullness would be the promise of God.

When the folks heard Jesus they put their faith in him.

There's always a response when people really hear Jesus.

The disciples left all they had and followed Jesus. Swapping a life of simple fishermen for a life that followed Jesus. The life didn't get easier, in many ways for them it would have become more difficult but they were free to live a life that had been set out for them, their calling the desire of their heart that God had given them. Life in all it's fullness.

The woman caught in adultery, not condemned and stoned as she thought but free to live a new life, one without sin, healed restored and forgiven. The light shone on the old life but free to live the life meant for her healed and forgiven. Set out to the world to shine the light and point people to Christ in her story of change.

As followers of Christ, we believe that Jesus is the light of the world and point to him in our lives. The light has shone on us and highlighted the need for us to be healed, restored and forgiven and through Christ we walk in that light.

Back to the skies at Loch Doon, in a world right now it's would be easy to see only darkness. We see all around us everyday life that is not being lived in its fulness, the need for healing, restoring and forgiveness. The search for truth but we remember the words of Leonard Cohen.

**“ Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget the perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That is how the light gets in.”**

In Leonard Cohen's amazing collection of songs there are some incredible gems, none more potent than his 1992 song "Anthem." Amongst the ridiculous amount of great lines over his long career, few can compare to the chorus – Ring the bells that still can ring/Forget your perfect offering/There is a crack in everything/That's how the light gets in."

It's a chorus that haunts me, though I've heard it a thousand times. It haunts me because it reminds me of God's love when I cannot imagine how some light can get into the wreckage I have often made of things...the cracks, the broken bits, the fractures I think of as detriments to the action of God are, in fact, the very places where God operates...where God squeezes in and shines.

In fact in story after story in the Bible, God is an agent of redemption, not an agent of purification. We do not leave our encounters with God made whole in the way that we might think about it – repaired and perfect – but rather when the Bible speaks of wholeness perhaps it means something else.

Perhaps it means that we accept more fully that God accepts us, despite our flaws, our shortcomings, our personality disorders and weakness, our doubts, insecurities and illnesses. Perhaps our wholeness means that God loves us all – and ALL of us, just how we are, just how we were created.

That seems like an easy formula – repentance, forgiveness, transformation – but apparently, such a realization does not suddenly transform our world.

In fact, we seem to go on doing what we always do, for our motives are complex. But here's to hoping that, like the old adage of walking a mile in someone else's shoes, we can start with small steps, each one helping us grant one another complexity, the gift of seeing

beyond the small labels we often stop with and seeking something more...the compassion that comes from stopping a quest for purity and beginning a search for meaning.

For we are created not to be unblemished beings, at least not in this lifetime, but rather to be flawed people who reach for greatness, who strive for perfection, who seek the divine...knowing that God does not stand on the top of the ladder, but beside us, on whichever rung we happen to be...or whichever rung our neighbour happens to be.

I'm not sure that I can state a wholly formed, well-crafted theology on the nature of a God who I continue to find mysterious, elusive, and fantastically frustrating. I can say that I remain convinced that God is in the business of creating, and that creation keeps right on creating, even when we try to kill it, or deny it, or ignore it.

The legend around Leonard Cohen's magical line – "There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in" – is that it comes from a book by Jack Kornfield on Buddhism.

In that book is a story of a young man who had lost his leg. He went to a Buddhist monastery to help deal with his extreme anger at his lot in life. When he first arrived he drew these pictures of cracked vases and damaged things, because he felt damaged

. Over time, as he found his inner peace, and changed his outlook, but still drew broken vases. His master asked him one day: "Why do you still draw a crack in the vases you draw? Are you not whole?" And he replied, "Yes, I am, and so are the vases. Now I know that the crack is how the light gets in."

To God the Father
God the son
God the Holy spirit

Amen.