

Dear Friends,

The changing of the clocks always seems to bring a sense of finality. The chapter of 'summer' has passed, and 'winter' has come. The leaves are blowing down the road and the nights are longer. The shops have been full of their 'cosy' ranges for weeks but with the unseasonably warmer weather this year, it's seemed to be something for the future than the present. Until today. The clocks go back. Now, it's as if the longer nights cannot be avoided any more.

The Bible has many references to darkness, and it is often associated with negative connotations. Yet there are many seeds found in the Bible, all of which are planted into the dark ground where they are cultivated by God. Psalm 139 recognises that the night is as bright as the day to God. As a psalm which has such a nurturing character it is helpful to see this and to be reminded that God knows everything about us. In John's gospel, we are reminded that "the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it." (*John 1:5*). This shows us that the light and the dark live well alongside one another and that even when there is light, there is also darkness alongside it.

At the time of year where firework displays start to be seen and heard, there is light in the darkness, but the darkness is not overcome. Without the darkness, the fireworks cannot be seen. There is the candle which is lit, to make a room seem cosier, and provide a sense of warmth. It shines in the darkness but the darkness is not overcome. Maybe there is a way after all, of holding together light and darkness.

We have a stereotypical view of darkness equating to things which are 'bad' and light which is 'good.' Maybe this might be an opportunity for us to consider how God encourages us to see the darkness as a place of nurture and presence. This won't work for everyone and that, of course, is fine. There are times where the darkness can provide a place to take stock, quietly grow in the background or practice new skills. God is present, Jesus is walking alongside, and the Holy Spirit is empowering. Maybe once new things have been worked through, they may be shared with others, and brought into the light so to speak. However, the darkness was needed to enable new things to then be seen.

Over the coming months, in the longer and darker evenings, maybe this is a time where we can focus on nurturing our God-given skills and talents in new ways. It could be an opportunity to share with others some new ideas and see how they develop. It could be a time to reflect on the presence of Jesus in our own lives, in the lives of those about whom we care and the wider world. From the nurture of God in Christ in the darkness, new things may come to fruition. I encourage us all to use the coming season as a time to reflect and nurture one another following the ways of Jesus.

God bless,
Chris