

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was in the beginning with God. 3All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.*

*5The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. 6There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. 14And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*

*15(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") 16From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.*

We had walked the same path for three days, Colin and I. Through rainforest, over a mountain pass, surrounded by snow capped mountain peaks. It was the kind of country to make one forget about the troubles of the world. Yet as we were taking it easy at the end of our journey our conversation turned to more complicated places. He spoke of his work in Manchester, England, making house calls on sick children. A mother promises to stop smoking around her child who is having difficulty breathing. But in three months or six Colin is back again in that smoke filled home prescribing medicine for that same child whose mother is making bad choices.

I talked about how important it was not to give up hope but to get politically involved. I spoke of the need for schools and roads and food for the millions of orphans in Africa.

Colin stopped me. "Some things are beyond hope," he said.

He told me of his trip to India – of how the untouchables there will mutilate themselves because only the disabled can beg. He said, "One man I saw set his arm on fire so he could beg for the food to stay alive. That arm was still smoldering when he begged from me." Some situations are beyond hope.

The gospel says, "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it."

Are these empty words?

I think Colin might think so. There are some places where no light is shining at all.

When we landed in New Zealand my first thoughts were: What a wonderful place to escape to! Beautiful scenery - not many people – far from all the world's troubles. What a temptation to just forget about all the darkness and to settle down where the sun shines! Not much chance of terrorists striking here – no tension between Palestinian and Jew here - no racial conflicts, no obvious poverty to be seen at all in Christchurch where we landed.

Ron was with us on our hike through the rainforest. He had grown up in South Africa – when things changed there he moved to Australia. He left the problems of his homeland for someone else to deal with.

I am deeply tempted to just forget about the darkness altogether.

Maybe some of you are. In one way the whole idea of suburbs is a fleeing from the troubles of the city. We will move out to where the schools are better, crime is less, houses nicer, - where poor people cannot afford to rent down the street.

Give me a place that I can flee to and just be happy – then I may not care whether light or darkness wins in the places I am not.

What do you think? Does the light shine in the darkness and does the darkness not overcome it? Or is this just an empty word – wishful thinking – foolishness.

John tells us that the word became flesh and lived among us. The light the darkness could not overcome settled down right in the middle of the mess that is human life. God's word, "Let there be light" was not just a word spoken to stars and universes but is a word lived by God in Jesus Christ. God did not run away. God did not give up hope. God did not take the easy path but "the Word became flesh and lived among us and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

You see, this word become flesh is not just some trial balloon but is the very being of God – a father’s only son – entering every darkness to bring the light of the love of God. And as we hear the whole story of this word we watch as darkness snuffs out the light that is this word made flesh. We will see how the darkness leaves the word dead in death, crucified.

And still God did not go away – withdraw to the suburbs of heaven. God did not say, “If that is the way they treat my son I will go on vacation forever. No, God raised the word – relit the light - promised that no matter how dark the darkness that the light of the love of God would shine there in Jesus raised from death.

Do you belong to Jesus? Then you belong to his work of being light in darkness. You belong to a God who is in the process of gathering all things in Jesus Christ, things in heaven and things on earth. That is what the second lesson promises – that God’s plan for the fullness of time is to gather up all things in him - in Christ - things in heaven and things on earth.

Humanly speaking darkness will always overcome the light. The Fridays of crucifixion happen over and over again. But this word of promise is not simply backed by your power and mine but by the very being of God – God’s own son. Never forget – the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it because that light is Jesus in this world and Jesus in you.

For the word did not just become flesh two thousand years ago but has become flesh in you – Christ in you. In this bread and in this cup the word of God enters your flesh to be light in every darkness.

And the light will continue to shine in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it. Ever.

