

Pentecost 15
10/9/2023

Mark the Evangelist

Romans 13:8-14

Psalm 119:33-40

Matthew 18:15-20

As if in the day

In a sentence

The ministry of Jesus in the world's dark places is a call to us to be, ourselves, light

As in the day

Though it is night, St Paul declares, live “as in the day”.

Clearly, he doesn't mean, Sleep less! Rather, he takes the natural division of day and night and uses them metaphorically to develop a subtle account of the human situation after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The day-night metaphor serves Paul in two principal ways. The most obvious is the suggestion that the night is nearly over, and that it is time for sleepers to wake. Dawn – the expected return of Christ – is about to break; awaken, then, and prepare for it.

But it's important that Paul's call here is not built on the threat that God is about to arrive, so you'd better look busy at good works. (Although, more good works is always good!). The possibility of living day-fully despite the night is found in the ministry of Jesus. For Paul, *even Christ on the cross* is night inhabited “as if in the day”. This is God in the world's night. The resurrection of Jesus reveals not only(?) that heaven is coming but that, in the person of Jesus right through his ministry, heaven was already present, in the world's night. It is just *this* Jesus whose future is coming.

Night as day

This means that Paul's metaphorical night and day are now not a thing which will pass or arrive but are interwoven here, in the moment within which we live. Time now no longer “flows” – second by second, hour by hour – from bad night to good day. Time is now a *choice*: to continue to sleep is now to *acquiesce* to the dark, letting it tell us what to do or to be. To awaken is to contradict the night, without wiping it away.

When Paul reminds us, then, “You know what season it is”, it is not to present the threat of the proverbial bus which might run me down tomorrow, so that I might get right with God now. He means rather: though it feels like night, life is possible here and now. The day is not so much “coming” as an addition to night, or its completion. The day is an *overlay* of the night, with the implication that *we are what we do in the night*.

Paul's own account of what constitutes night-like activities is somewhat moralistic, although covering the kinds of things most people would think should be avoided – drunkenness, debauchery, jealousy, and the like. To these, we might add other modern immoralities operating under the cover of darkness: the anonymous internet troll hides in the dark, as does the hidden-in-plain-sight child molester and the online scammer.

But darkness is also active in more subtle ways. Consider our modern denial of death, treating it as a night we would rather pretend is not there. Or consider our next month in politics in terms of a struggle over what is night and what is day in the form of debates over the question of the Parliamentary Voice. What are we to do with the dark colonial history and its continuing effects? We cannot simply declare – as elements of the No

campaign do – that the night is overcome with the passage of time, and we are now in a new day. The night continues, but the glimmer of day is possible.

And debates about global warming will themselves doubtless heat up if the coming summer here is like what it has been in the northern hemisphere this year. What does Paul's "as in the day" look like in the deep night of an intensely carbonised economy?

Being day

Of course, living "as in the day" is not always straightforward. But Paul calls us from any refusal on our part to see, as if we had grounds to claim that we are blinded by the night. Christ on the cross is the presence of God in the dark, God's kingdom come. It is by this strange light that the church sees. The call to discipleship is the call to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (13. 13), and be such light in darkness. Take up your cross and follow: be day in the night. Be hope calling to despair. Be forgiveness where it is not sought. Be mercy.

None of this is because "God is coming," and we better be ready. It is because God has already come, light shining in the darkness, revealing the truth and destiny of us and all things. God's approach in the night of the world is the only thing which will light the darkness in and around us. For God is neither afraid of the dark, nor hides in it, nor simply washes it all away. God is the possibility of day in the night.

And this is what the disciples of Christ are to be as well. We are here today because we suspect that – though it is night – day is more than a rumour.

More than a rumour, it is a revelation – in the ministry of Jesus – and a calling – live "as in the day".

Let us live, then, as in the day, as light in the midst of darkness.
