

When You Are in Darkness, Christ Is Your Light

Seeing is believing, they say. Thomas would agree. That first Easter evening, when Jesus appeared in living flesh and blood to His amazed disciples, Thomas wasn't there. When they told him what they had seen, he was incredulous: "*Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I shall never believe*" (John 20:25).

We understand Thomas, don't we? His reaction reflects our own experience: dead people don't walk and talk. It makes sense that Thomas would want to see Jesus with his own eyes. I think I would, too.

Eight days later, Thomas got his proof.

The disciples were again together in that same locked room, and this time Thomas was among them. The risen Lord suddenly appeared again. "*Put your finger here,*" Jesus said, indicating the nail marks in His hands. He invited Thomas, "*Put out your hand, and place it in My side,*" showing His flesh wound. "*Do not disbelieve, but believe*" (John 20:27).

And Thomas called Him "God." "*My Lord and my God,*" he confessed. Jesus responded, "*Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*" (John 20:29).

That's where you and I come in. More than twenty centuries separate us from that night when Jesus appeared alive to His astonished disciples. We've never laid eyes on Jesus or touched His living body with our own hands. Yet Jesus tells us there's a blessing for people like us, who believe without seeing Him.

Remember this blessing when you walk through the dark days that are sure to come into your life. That darkness comes in all sizes and shapes.

When you wrestle with chronic worry or pass through deep valleys of anguish, grief, or despair, it's hard to cling to God's promises. If your body is also wracked with pain, it's hard to think straight, let alone pray. If your mind is locked in trauma mode and you're hit with panic attacks, it's hard to focus on anything else. If your heart is pounding and your head is reeling, it's hard to think of God, much less pray.

Faith is weak at these times. Sometimes, it's just hanging by a thread. Yet faith is faith, and if you believe in Jesus in those darkest valleys of your distress, you are blessed. Jesus said so Himself!

"*Now we see in a mirror dimly*" Paul wrote, "*but then face to face*" (1 Corinthians 13:12). What we shall one day see with our own risen eyes in eternal glory, we can already dimly see by faith.

Unfortunately, what we perceive by faith is often clouded in anxiety and murky with fear. Anxiety and fear frequently merge into doubt - and occasionally something worse. Suffering saints through the centuries have told of dark nights of the soul when God seems absent and unresponsive. In those fearful times, hope begins to fade and faith grows dim. Yet even then, Jesus' blessing holds firm: "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*"

But what should we do when the future is uncertain and faith seems futile? When God seems far away? What can we do when fear takes over and sorrow overwhelms us? Where can we find light in our own dark nights? The psalmist guides our way. King David voices the anguished cry of every suffering saint who has ever wondered if God is absent: "*Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, You are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me*" (Psalm 139:7-10).

God is present everywhere, even when our human eyes do not detect Him. Though we cannot see Him, He sees us. Were we to climb to the heights of heaven, descend to the depths of hell, or fly away to the farthest seas, His gracious presence would still be there. Even when we feel abandoned, He is present with us every moment of every day. In stormy seas of uncertainty and deep, dark valleys of despair, when we sense nothing but fear and dread, His hand still leads and His love still supports us. Through every long and lonely night of misery, God Himself stands guard, holding us safe and secure. Darkness is no threat to Him. If I say, "*Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night, even the darkness is not dark to You; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with You*" (Psalm 139:11-12).

No doubt you've had your share of long, dark nights; most Christians have. Grief, pain, or loss of one sort or another will bring those times of darkness into your life. When you can't sleep, your body's telling you your mind is on overload and your heart is breaking. Some nights it's hard to pray, and when you do it seems like no one's there to listen. In that darkness, you will feel that God is gone and your own misery is your only company. Although this wonderful world God made for us contains a lot of beauty and happiness, it also holds a lot of

ugliness. And sorrow. And fear. And pain. And death.

But remember, we serve a Lord who snatched life from the jaws of death. He brought light into darkness. One Friday afternoon at Calvary, darkness enveloped Jesus while He suffered extreme agony of body, mind, and spirit upon His cross. After three anguished hours of torture, He breathed His last, and His friends took His battered, bloodied body down and buried Him in a borrowed tomb.

In a physical body - just like ours - Jesus bore our sin and carried our sorrows.

The price of our sins was paid in human flesh and bone, blood, sweat, and tears. Jesus experienced pain like ours. Fear and dread came upon Him just like it does on us, and He felt our human anguish with every fibre of His being.

But by His cross and in the death that He died, Christ Jesus brought life and immortality. Three days later He emerged from His grave victorious over death and hell, transforming this world's darkness into everlasting light.

Although you may spend long hours in anguished prayer wondering if God is even there to hear you, you can be sure that your private darkness is not dark to Him. Night is as bright as day to Him, and darkness is as light (Psalm 139:12). He sees clearly in the dark. And you can be sure He will hold you, safe. "*He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him*" (Daniel 2:22).

When you were baptised you were born again, into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3).

Now your life is securely anchored in the living flesh and blood of your crucified Lord.

True, you haven't seen Jesus for yourself like Thomas, neither have you traced the print of the nails in His hands or touched the wound in His living flesh. But you do believe in Him nonetheless, and so you are blessed. Jesus said so.

Though your nights are unbearably long and your darkness impenetrably deep, Christ Jesus will sustain you and see you through them. You may not see Him now, but you will see Him soon enough - on the day of the resurrection of all flesh. Then all sorrow and sighing will flee away, and death will be no more. God will wipe away your every tear with His own hand. Then you will enter into the eternal joy of your Master, a joy no one will ever be able to take away.

Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1:8-9).

In the deepest valleys of your life, through every long and dark night, in every trouble, you can call upon Christ Jesus. Pour out your complaints to Him. Pray, praise, and give Him thanks. His promise stands forever sure: "*I am yours and you are Mine, and there is nothing that can ever separate Me from you or you from Me.*"