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What a year

As I mentioned in my introduction a couple of weeks ago, we're moving inexorably into COVID-19 first anniversaries. Today marks The Big One for the team at the Arthur Rank Centre: it's one year since we started working from home.

It's tempting to launch into a reflection into the significance of that, or a litany of things the Arthur Rank Centre has achieved in that time, and I think that would be an understandable response!

But actually, I just want to pause and let the weight of that settle a little bit.

One year.

As your own first anniversaries come and go – and some will have come and gone already – try to resist the temptation to rush past or ignore them. Notice them. Notice how they make you feel. Notice how they make others feel.

Everyday we carry the weight of the last year.

Sometimes that weight is almost undetectable.

Sometimes it's unbearable.

I love The Message's rendering of Matthew 11:28-30:

'Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.'

As we travel together through this set of first anniversaries, may you know the presence of the One who invites us to keep company with him, who meets us in our exhaustion and burnout, and teaches us to live freely and lightly.

Go well...

Louise, on behalf of the Arthur Rank Centre team

Bible reading: John 8:12-20

Jesus the Light of the World

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'

Then the Pharisees said to him, 'You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid.' Jesus answered, 'Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is valid; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf.'

Then they said to him, 'Where is your Father?' Jesus answered, 'You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.' He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

Reflection

I've always heard 'I am the light of the world' as a 'nice' bit of scripture, giving rise to wonderful images and paintings down the ages. But when he says it, Jesus is teaching in the temple treasury, presumably surrounded by items of gold and silver, perhaps embellished with jewels. Everyone would have seen the glinting reflections from precious objects.

The rest of the conversation isn't at all 'nice'. Jesus is engaged in verbal combat with legal experts, who were looking for evidence that could be used to shut him up by any means. He's not out on a sunny hillside surrounded by hundreds of people wanting to hear what he has to say and work out with him how it affects their lives. Instead, he is indoors with his back to the wall in a hostile room. Despite this, he still makes this extraordinary claim, that those who follow him will have the light of life. Not the light reflected by shiny things made by human hands, but the light of life.

For those who cannot see very well, or for those who are blind, the language of darkness (often assumed to mean 'bad') and light (often assumed to mean 'good') can be difficult. As the world continues to reckon with both the historical and contemporary impact of systemic racism, we are becoming all too aware that the use of 'light' and 'dark' to speak of skin colour has too often been used in damaging and pejorative ways.

Even as winter becomes spring, it can be tempting to see longer days and increased sunlight as 'good' after the 'bad' of the darkness of winter. But, of course, we need both: the earth needs wintertime to recuperate and make ready, seeds and bulbs need time in the dark and cold of the earth in order to germinate. Human beings are no different; we need the darkness of night and of sleep to recover after the day that's gone before and prepare for the one that lies ahead.

When Jesus described himself as the Light of the World, he was promising to walk alongside each of us, offering us the chance to be the reflection of God's light in the world. Contrast that with the attitude of the Pharisees in this passage. They were looking only for the chance to find a charge they could bring against Jesus and did not hear to that promise any more than the gold and silver valuables in the temple treasury could hear it.

Today we look around our communities and see the interplay of darkness and light in the new growth and new life of spring, we see continuing signs of hope that the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic might really be over, and we continue on our journey through Lent towards Easter. May we have the courage to hold the complex relationship between light and dark in our world, in our communities, in our churches, in our families and in our own individual lives.

Prayer

Loving God, when we are hemmed in and cannot see a way through shadows and light, give us wisdom and courage to reach out to others without fear. When we see others struggling to see you in all your glory, give us courage and wisdom to offer kind and gentle help. We thank you for giving us the light of life and ask that others may find you in that light as we reflect it. Amen.

Response

- Consider a favourite view or image and think about how you use the words 'light' and 'dark'. Notice how in what you see, both light and dark are necessary.
- Do you know anyone who might need a hand today? Who might appreciate a phone call, or a wave through a window?

How are you sharing the good news of the light of life offered by Jesus