

Edmund Morris, in the first volume of the trilogy, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, writes of Theodore's first wife Alice and his dedication to her. Alice Hathaway Lee was a striking woman and only seventeen years old when Theodore met her. On October 27, 1880, they were married at the Unitarian church in Brookline; Massachusetts aged 19 and 22 respectively. They had a brief honeymoon and then they took up residence in New York City while Theodore registered to study at the Columbia Law School.

Roosevelt was elected to the New York Assembly in 1882. On February 13, 1884, he received a telegram whilst in Albany with the happy news that his wife Alice had given birth to a baby girl the night before. But several hours later, he received a second telegram indicating that she was dying and his mother who lived in the same house was dying too. Alice died of Bright's disease and his mother of acute typhoid fever. The two women closest to him died within hours of each other. Theodore famously drew a cross in his diary for February 14, 1884, and wrote beneath, "The light has gone out of my life." (1)

We all have experienced darkness too, perhaps not such as Theodore suffered, but we all have undoubtedly said similar words at one time or another. We may have lost a loved one. We may have lost our way and cannot find the right direction. We may be having difficulty making decisions, worried about making the wrong choice. We may have little self-esteem — feeling we will never amount to anything. We may even be in such despair that we have become convinced that no one cares for us, not even God, if there is one. Yes, we have known darkness too.

Our gospel reading today speaks to us if we sense we are walking in darkness. The Gospel of John had much to say about light in contrast to darkness.

John the Baptist is portrayed as one who comes to bear witness, "to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him." He is adamant that he is not the light, "but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world" (John 1:7-9). Light is a prominent symbol in the Hebrew scriptures as well as in the New Testament. Light was associated with God and with the Law of Moses. The Psalmist declared: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1) The psalmist also associated light with the Law. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Psalm 119:105).

The prophets also equated light with God's protection: "The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. ... when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me." (Micah 7:8).

As we read the gospel of John it soon becomes apparent that John the Baptist is not hesitant in referring to Jesus as the light. Later, Jesus himself in one of his great "I am" sayings makes this startling promise: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

We also recall from Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount that he called his disciples "the light of the world." It was not so much that his followers would produce their own light, but rather the light they had was a borrowed or reflected light. As they stayed close to Jesus, they had a radiance that was noticeable to others. The purpose of his disciples letting their light shine before the world was not to call attention to themselves but rather that they may see your good works "and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

Even the smallest glimmer of light can work wonders — if Jesus is connected to it. Does one light ever make a real difference? Sometimes it makes a world of difference without us even knowing it.

Jesus, “the light of the world,” continues to speak to those who struggle in darkness. He speaks to the ones who have lost their way and points them to the way. He speaks to the ones who are frustrated in their decision-making and challenges them to take up their cross and follow him. He speaks to the ones with low self-esteem and reveals to them the God who says, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). Finally, he speaks to the ones who feel that no one cares for them, not even God, and he reminds them that God has been seeking them even before they had a thought about God.

So how do we let the light of Christ that we have received shine before people that they may see our good works and give glory to our father in heaven?

It is in the midst of darkness that we must re-learn the lesson that we don’t draw people to Christ by being judgmental, bossy, self-righteous, possessive, and controlling. We don’t draw people to Christ by telling others we are right and they are wrong. We draw people to Christ by reflecting a light that is so lovely and compelling that they want, with all of their hearts to know the source of it.

The message of Advent is that God’s light is stronger than the darkness, God’s love is stronger than hate, and God’s power is stronger than death. How will the world know unless we show them? We have a nation filled with broken and hurting people who are wondering, “Where is God? Is this all there is to life — selfishness, hate, violence, and dispute? Is this all there is?” How will the world know any different unless we show them the light? That is your job this week and that is my job this week. We are to take the light of Christ that is in here, in this beautiful church and amongst us, and carry it with us — to our work places, homes and shops we visit. Let Jesus’ light shine through you! If there is to be peaceful change in this world, it begins in each of us! And Jesus, “the light of the world,” assures us that at the end there will be a “candle in the window” awaiting us as well. Amen.

Fr Robert Newton

1. Edmund Morris, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2010), p.230.