

Darkness. It's a word that for many personifies the month of November. The clocks have gone back, the days seem very much shorter, we breakfast before the sun has fully risen and have tea in the twilight. There is a chill in the air and grey clouds often extend the darkness of evening into the day. In most years the autumn leaves have fallen by now – perhaps not so much this year – and the earth seems to be asleep.

No wonder people try to bring light and life into this most autumnal of autumn months: Halloween attempts to turn representations of evil and dark powers - inspired by novels like Dracula and Frankenstein and the horror movies they spawned - into something garish: an artificial brightness which makes light of all that is truly dark: evil forces which are real and truly frightening are reduced to caricatures. It is as if it were an attempt to overshadow the commemorations which follow: All Saints, which gives Halloween its name, and All Souls, when we remember all those we have loved and lost; followed soon after by the commemoration of the casualties of war: Remembrance. Guy Fawkes Day – or what has become the fireworks 'season' – fits in between All Souls and Remembrance. It is again a shallow celebration of what were in fact dark doings: conspiracy, attempted murder, torture and executions.

Finally, bizarrely, the world starts to behave as if it were already Christmas: the shops are transformed into bright, colourful spaces, 'celebrities' one has never heard of compete in the ballroom or a jungle camp, television adverts try selling us a surprising variety of perfumes in images just short of pornographic, and a whole channel is devoted to Christmas movies. Yet November is no less dark and chilly, and the lonely are lonelier, the homeless hungrier and the despairing more lost than ever. Maybe there is a parable in this juxtaposition of shallow celebration – when there is little to celebrate – and the reality of death and destruction, loss and grief in the real world.

The unspoken question is, as always, where is God in all this? The late Michael Howard, Anglican priest and a friend and colleague of mine, wrote a book during his sabbatical: *God in the Depths*. It was in part born of his own encounters with darkness, represented by the sea. In it he says this:

Many modern adults would like to be rid of God, and they show it by living day by day as though he never existed at all... But, come a personal crisis when life, and particularly feelings, for a moment seem out of control, and thoughts turn to [God]. God won't lie down.

I like November. As a veteran, it means much to me, but it's more than that. To me it is the month of promise. The earth sleeps, only to regenerate and reawaken in the spring. In the darkness God won't lie down. In grief and sorrow and regret, God won't lie down. In the world of the cold and hungry and despairing, God won't lie

down. The great, though rather rebellious Catholic theologian Hans Küng, who died last year, expresses it in a different way:

God's love does not protect us AGAINST all suffering. But it protects us IN all suffering... This is the harmony...established in the cross. The definitive victory of the love of a God who is not an unconcerned, unloving being, whom suffering and injustice cannot move, but who himself has assumed and will assume [men's] suffering in love.

November is the doorway to the celebration of the Incarnation: the birth of Jesus, Immanuel, God with us. Christmas – the authentic Christmas, which points to the cross – is what helps us make sense of the darkness, the sorrow, the depths, and even death itself, and faces head on all the evil in the world. Happy November!

Peter

Good News/Mission Resources

Sight Loss Friendly Churches

How often does someone in the UK begin to lose their sight? Are you surprised that it's every six minutes, which equates to approximately 250 people a day?

Approximately 2.5 million people are living with sight loss, and everyone is living with a different experience. It is interesting that when we think of registered blind, we think that a person can see nothing and yet if we use the term partially sighted, we assume they can see much more than they actually can. Actually 93% of those registered blind can see something.

Torch Trust <https://torchtrust.org/> is an ecumenical Christian ministry that focuses on the spiritual support and encouragement of blind and partially sighted people. For over 60 years they have been providing accessible resources and a variety of ways to connect and support people living with sight loss.

Their services include:

Reading library (accessible Christian literature)

Bible Reading Notes and magazines

Befriending

Holidays

Local groups for fellowship

Torch Trust can help your church to become more aware of how to support people with sight loss and can also assist individuals.