

AN ADVENT REFLECTION FROM ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU (1931-2021) - given in London in November 1994

That brings me to the Advent message. It was precisely in the darkness where it looked like there was no way forward that the light which lightens everyone came into the world. And not into an ideal world: Christ came into a world that was at war, was rife with injustice, into a people under an army of occupation - think of how he was born and how quickly he became a refugee. This is the reality of so many of us. And in the incarnation God breaks into this and says,

"I am Emmanuel, I am God-with-you. I am one who is not going to give you good advice from a safe distance. I enter the fiery furnace with you."

This is a message squeezed out of us so many times in the tragic situations we have been through. There is no other God who knows how to deal with chaos, through death and resurrection. How can we survive if we don't have this faith, that victory is ours through him who loved us? We have seen it! Faith has been vindicated in Africa - and not just in South Africa either.

The Advent message is for you as well. Give grace a chance! You have come into a culture of success. That's sad in many ways. It says the worst thing that can happen to a human being is to fail; that it doesn't matter what you succeed in so long as you succeed. If you can't pull yourself up by your bootstrings you are out. Compassion, gentleness, become almost swear words. "People must stand on their own feet" - yes, in a sense. But Christian faith says we are not made for independence but for INTERdependence. And maybe what will come from the weak and not-so-successful is the reminder to you that Christianity is a faith of grace. Grace is a gift. It says you are subsidised by God. One of my favourite Christmas hymns is "O little town of Bethlehem" with that wonderful verse:

How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is given.

There was no fanfare - so very much like how the despised, the unimportant, come into this world. So God gives. Can you learn to receive, not just from us but from God?

May this truly be a season of renewed hope and deepening peace for us all.

God bless you,

DESMOND TUTU