

Focusing In . . . November

We are entering the darkest season of the year but not simply due to the absence of sunshine as the days grow shorter. For me, it starts with Halloween and I am so glad that my children have finally outgrown the event and I can mostly ignore the day on the calendar. My daughter's birthday is October 30th so we often felt that Halloween overshadowed her day. I've never been opposed to Halloween, but at any time I'm uncomfortable with masks and scary movies and the guilt of extra sugar in the house, so it's only redeeming feature to me was cute kids coming to the door.

Next comes Remembrance Day and I wonder what we think we are remembering but actually are forgetting; such as the cost of continually sending off our young to fight our battles while refusing to personally attack the root causes of war; forgetting that our sacrifices must start **before** the wars begin. Have we learned any lessons? And before we know it, the ever-extended Christmas Season has arrived with treks to the mall in a futile effort to find material goods to give as suitable representations of love.

It is a dark time, but it never gets pitch black. When the sun drops out of direct sight, it offers its light to the moon. Halloween is designed glorify the dark side, but the children's smiles beaming on my doorstep outshine its efforts hands down. There may be lessons more forgotten than learned, but November 11th gives us a chance at least enter the conversation once again and ask, "is there a better way?" And then dawns Advent with its flame of hope that scatters the deepest darkness.

Our world often appears more shrouded in darkness than light, with its senseless violence, fickle markets and human travesties. In September, I attended the International Conference on Prostitution and heard some very dark stories of young girls stripped of their dignity and identity, through violation and slavery. It was easy to be overwhelmed with the horrible stories of abuse and exploitation, especially the violation of young children. I often wanted to shake the world and scream at it, "WHY!" Why are we so sick and perverted that we can't guard and protect our children from molestation? It is really beyond comprehension that humans can be so dehumanizing in the name of sex.

At the same time, I don't know that I have ever seen the light of Christ shine more brightly than watching former prostituted women dance in praise to the One who has set them free. I forget to believe in miracles. I forget about the incredible transforming power of the love of Jesus in the lives of people totally broken and beaten by life. But I watched these beautiful women wave their colorful shawls and dance their testimony in pure joy, safe and free in the presence of their Beloved.

With that picture embedded in my heart, I can gladly embrace this season of darkness. In a room lit with a single candle, I remember and celebrate this: "the light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it" (John 1: 5)