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Christmas always brings to mind loved ones who have died, doesn't it? There is something beautiful and tender—and at the same time, maddening—about the nostalgia of Christmas. We think back to Christmases of yesteryear and of all the faces that once graced our holiday tables, and we ache at the void in our lives their absence has left.

Advent has a decidedly dark dimension to it; indeed, the entire movement of the season as we progress towards Christmas is an ever-darkening world receiving the light of God, which comes to us in the form of Jesus Christ, the Light of the World.

Anyway, I, of course, think of my friend Page, who has been dead almost 6 years already. I remember sitting with him at the Clarissa Cook Hospice House, listening to Renaissance Christmas with him, eating pfeffernuesse cookies which he insisted I bake for him, because they reminded him of his years in Holland. With the cookies, we were drinking Chinese black tea. On this particular visit, Page mentioned that his cancer doctor had just told him the day before that Page had a 5% chance of living three more months. I asked him how he felt about this.

He replied, "Well, it means there is 5% chance of *survival*."

I replied, "That's not much hope, Page."

He replied, "Perhaps, but *some* hope is much better than none at all."

And to that we clinked our mugs of tea, drinking to some hope, rather than none at all.

What does it *really* mean to us to have Jesus come into our world?

Does it mean our friends and family suddenly stop suffering and dying? Does it mean nobody gets cancer or diabetes or MS anymore? Does it mean people stop having seizures, babies stop having birth defects, children stop being abused? Does Jesus coming to this earth change our reality at all?

It doesn't appear to.

Because bad things still happen, and we can't pretend they don't. People still suffer. Creation still aches and groans. In my dark moods, I wonder if religion is little more than mental manipulation, offering people false expectations for this life and false hope for a life after this one.

But my faith prevents me from believing this.

I remember one time when I was in Kathmandu, sitting on top of the roof of the hospital where we were working in the chilly month of January, in the foothills of the Himalaya mountains. Because Nepal is a third world country, when the sun sets behind the mountains, a darkness descends, a darkness like I had never before experienced. No street lights, no neon signs, no golden arches to break it up...simply the inkiest, thickest darkness I had ever experienced. Until, that night up on the roof, I saw in the distance a tiny fire that someone had lit...and then in the distance, another tiny fire...and then another...so maybe a dozen little bonfires were burning in the alleys and fields down below, you could almost make out the shadowy shapes of people moving about. Compared to the immense, gaping darkness of the mountains beyond, the little bonfires seemed ridiculously small. But they were there, even in their smallness.

Could they offer enough light for one to navigate one's way through the entire city? Could they offer safe passage to a neighboring village? Could they offer enough

light for one to work or read or cook? No. But they offered enough light to faintly see the face of a mother or father or spouse or child, to reach out and grasp the shoulder or hand of another human being, so as not to feel so very alone. The fire offered just enough light to reveal the reality that you were not alone.

Is this what Jesus' arrival is for us?

Does he come, not to bring us all the hope we could possibly ever want or need, but rather to offer some hope, whereas before none at all existed?

After all, a tiny speck of light in a distant field is far better than infinite darkness.

A tiny baby born into a very broken world does not bathe it in light and glory and healing....yet. One day, but not yet. Now is the time for some, it is not the time for everything. It is the time for some hope, which is far better than no hope. It is hope that sustains us through sorrow and disease and suffering and death and heartbreak...it is not all the hope we could ever possibly hope for, but it is *some*.

And sometimes, some is enough.

There is a Chinese proverb that says, "A candle is a protest at midnight. It says to the darkness, 'I beg to differ.'"

Memories of Chinese tea savored with a sorely missed friend; wisdom from a Chinese proverb, reminding us that some light is better than none, some hope is better than none. Because when you are surrounded by absolute and total darkness, a tiny ray of light is more than something, it is absolutely everything.