

Sunday Thoughts - 6th December, 2020

Good Morning folks! As this is the second Sunday in Advent, we begin with one of my favourite Advent hymns O Come O Come Emmanuel.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C65aJef1J_Y

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. (Isaiah 9v2)

Isaiah lived at a very dark time morally and spiritually. Ahaz was the king at the time; he raided the Temple, stole from the Treasury and installed a pagan shrine in the Temple itself. These were dark days indeed. Despite all this, Isaiah did not despair. Instead, he spoke of a PERSON, a special person who was the complete opposite of any earthly ruler. "There will be no more gloom" (9v1).

Everything will change because of the birth of this special person.

For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given and the government will be upon his shoulder. His name will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (v6)

Isaiah caught a glimpse of someone who ,700 years later walked the streets of Jerusalem. This was Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. In John's gospel chapter 8v12 Jesus says "I am the Light of the World." The setting of the saying is in the Temple during the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles which was a time of great celebration. In the centre of the Temple there were four huge candlesticks. When darkness came these were lit sending a great blaze of light throughout Jerusalem, piercing the darkness of its courts and lanes.

When the feast was over, the candles were put out, no doubt sending a great amount of smoke throughout Jerusalem. Jesus faces his critics, perhaps pointing to the candles that were no longer burning and declares, in contrast to the extinguished candles, "I am the Light of the World."

This is no ordinary light, John tells us in his gospel; it is PERSONAL (its source is Jesus), and POWERFUL (No amount of sin and darkness can put it out).

We sing the lovely hymn Longing for Light

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrCqNW6JDYk>

This version is sung by Brian Field McFarland.

During the dark days up until Christmas we can rejoice in the great truth that Jesus Christ is the Light of the World, and even in a world in which there is so much evil, injustice and suffering his light will always shine. Even in our world which has been plagued by COVID and all the devastation it has brought, his light still shines.

Where is this personal and powerful light to be seen? The amazing fact is that Jesus Christ shows his light in and through ordinary, imperfect people like you and me; those working in hospitals, care homes and especially those who are reaching out to those whose lives are full of pain and despair.

I don't know if any of you saw this very moving film earlier this week on the BBC about Pastor Mick Fleming and Father Alex Frost. They are trying to reach out to some desperately needy people in Burnley. The following evening there was an update on local news, and Mick Fleming described the overwhelming response they had received from people offering to help distribute food, others donating money and food for the Food Bank.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVATfy5AcuQ>

The poor in Burnley and the Ministry of Pastor Mick Fleming an all with Church one the Streets.

The challenge to us all is clear, not just at Advent but all year round. Are we asking God to show the light of His healing love to other people? How can we do this? Sometimes we can do it in very ordinary, simple ways - listening to someone who is anxious or lonely, a visit, a card, a phone call. We shall be blessed even if we give "a cup of cold water in Jesus' name (Matthew 10v42)

Points for prayer:

Pray for our leaders as they continue to make difficult decisions about keeping the country safe.

Give thanks that there is a vaccine available in the next few weeks.

Remember those in Care Homes who have not seen their loved ones for such a long time. We think of the Homes near to the church and pray for all residents and staff. Pray for those in our church who work in hospitals and Care Homes.

We pray for the young people of our church from the youngest to the oldest.

Do pray for the Elders of the church as they meet later this week to consider opening for services over Christmas.

We pray for the families of those who have lost loved ones recently and ask for comfort and strength.

For those who have been ill; we give thanks that they are feeling much better.

For those like Pastor Mick Fleming and Father Alex Frost in Burnley, and others like them who seek to bring the love of God to very desperate people.

Pray for countries like Syria and the Yemen who - on top of suffering poverty and injustice are now faced with COVID.

Let us pray for one another at this time of Advent that we may be aware of God's great love for us. May we have a fresh insight into the coming of Jesus into the world.

This is a lovely piece called Drive out the Darkness.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpGu359wRjE&list=RDcpGu359wRjE&index=1>

A final prayer

Lord Jesus, so work in our hearts and lives that something of your healing light will shine in us as we seek to reach out to the needy all around us. In your precious name. Amen.

God bless you all, Ray and Margaret