

A Light to the People

Isaiah 9:1-4

Anyone else get into trouble as a child for leaving the lights on? No? Just me then?? And you know what? When my children leave lights on in rooms they're not using, it drives me potty!! Do you think we're made of money?? I sound exactly like my dad - who, it turns out, was just talking sense! A light left on is often a sign that someone is coming back, a light to guide the way home, a light to warn of danger - as a child there were minimal streetlights and slippery steps as we would arrive home, so the outside light would guide you through the gate and up the steps with a modicum of safety...

We leave a light on if someone's coming home late. We leave a light on as a sign that we are 'at home' to visitors. We leave a light on for the carol singers. It is a sign of visible expectation and welcome to those who pass by - in fact a light seen far off can serve as a welcome to a place of warmth and safety for the weary traveller...

I have to be a bit more careful now that these sermons are going out further than the 4 walls of the church in what illustrations I use - don't want to get into too much trouble with too many people... But I do have a fairly 'country' story for you. Some of you will have experienced the joy of the Night Hike ... basically, it's like regular hiking but with no view and more opportunity for breaking yourself... well, we decided as a Guide Patrol that a night hike would be lots of fun and we could scare ourselves a bit in the process. We had wandered down to the beach and were making our way back through the field paths to home when all at once a cow stood up on the path in front of one of the more excitable Guides... She screamed! Then the cow started to moo loudly and other cows stood up too. There was much, skittishness among brave night hikers and cows and then much running, shrieking and standing in cow pats. We certainly achieved the 'scaring ourselves a bit' part of the programme and we also went home absolutely filthy.

Without light, the ordinary becomes scary and strange. Without light, hazards are unwittingly stepped into and without light there is an inability to interpret what is in front of you. In conclusion, light is good. But you all knew this already.

Fast-forward a couple of decades and I was part of another night hike - now far less prone to screaming and far more sensible of footwear, we took a walk with the young people from church to a place out in the country where we paused to worship God, to drink hot chocolate from the big flasks and to eat do-nuts. We each had a jar with a night-light in it and we lit them and placed them along the dry-stone wall. In the darkness, we noticed how the smallest light made a difference to the heavy weight of darkness that surrounded us. We began to sing; "light of the world, you stepped down into darkness", confidence rising in our worship. The light of the world was coming into the world and that light was making all the difference. There was no fear, just a sense of this being church and God being near. In the place of deepest darkness, to actively seek the light was to allow it to make the biggest impact.

Into the distress, into the anxiety, into the night of unknowing - the light has dawned. The great light is shining. As we look at these familiar words in Isaiah's prophecy, for those who are still faithful to God, the light is promised and God's promises are faithful and true. It may be that this feels like a promise that is meaningless in the moment - but we know that the light of God's

promise is an eternal blessing - of salvation and hope reaching into history and making sense of the world, the world of covenant love and hope that transcends time.

To walk in faithfulness to God IS to walk in the light, confident that this is the right direction even though it will take - shall we say - a FEW years before the Light that is Jesus is born. As people who understand the prophetic nature of life - that we live under and enveloped by the promises of God, we can be confident that even in the darkest of times, God sees us and is holding the promise of salvation - Jesus the Light of the World - the light for all the people - he is holding this out towards us.

The way ahead for all of us is lit by hope and we talk towards it through Advent - some of the greyest days, made even greyer by the looming threat of COVID and the potential of Tier 3 with all of its limitations. We NEED the great light, into which we walk out of the despair and gloom of distress, loneliness, feeling trapped and so on. The moment of release from these physical constraints will not be immediate - but the light has dawned. Hope is rising. The light of the world is stepping into the darkness.

We know this and acknowledge it in lights of prophetic hope seen all around us in the greyest and dullest of months. Into December, we place candles, and twinkle lights. We place lit trees and bright displays in our windows, from our rooftops and around our garden shrubbery. The light of the world is coming... away with gloom - we live under the promise of a bright shining, great Light... the promised salvation of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. For those of you who are getting to know me - I did mention that my favourite colour is "sparkly" and to those who would argue that this isn't a colour - I say, "nonsense"! The sparkles in people's eyes, the sparkles of frost in sunlight, the sparkles of sequin and glitter denote the radiance that draws attention to colour - lit by a light within, or the beam of light shining onto them, the sparkle makes you take notice. The Christmas sparkles make us take notice of the Great Light of Jesus... so to quote Mr Poppy off "Nativity!" Sparkle & Shine! - I'll link it at the end of this video!!

We have seen the great light. God has put the light on and he's not complaining about the cost of the electricity bill. God has left the light on for you to live in it's beam, to follow it home, to see it in the distance and know that to reach it is to reach the promises of God, the fulfilment of prophecy and salvation of all the world.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light... on those living in deep darkness a light has dawned - God has done this and is still providing it. Even today, we can live in the hope it offers, because of God's faithfulness and love - even for you, and even for me.

Amen.