



THE LIGHT SHINES STILL

A Pastoral Letter for December from the Bishop of St Asaph To all the faithful of the Teulu Asaph

One of the very greatest passages of scripture, in my opinion, opens the Gospel according to Saint John. It is known to scholars as “the Prologue”, because although it is part of John’s account of the ministry of Jesus, it begins, not like Matthew’s Gospel or Luke’s, with the story of Jesus’ birth, but with a meditation upon the eternal significance of the Lord. It speaks about God as the one who gives Life and who is Light, and proclaims: “The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can’t grasp it” (John 1.5)

There’s an ambiguity in the original text which was written in antique Greek – “can’t grasp it” could mean “can’t understand it” or “can’t pin it down” or even “can’t hold it back”. It signifies hope. No matter how dark things get, no matter how much chaos threatens to overwhelm, the light of God still shines, and the threat of darkness can’t conquer. The power of evil, which is so often self-centred, cannot comprehend the true nature of Love, which is to give, to share and to serve – which is, quite simply, life-giving.

It’s in this context that John sets the birth of Jesus – the Word of God dwelt among us, he writes, full of grace and truth. At a time when the gloom of wintry nights and cold and cloudy days can be monotonous, when talk of Covid lockdown and illness still swirls around, when we all recognise that Christmas will be different this year, the message that God’s light seeks to kindle the fire of love afresh in our hearts is good news for those who turn in faith to seek God’s help. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it.

Light has a magnificent quality. Even the smallest amounts of light dispel darkness, and when the flame of a candle is shared, it doubles the amount of light, as both flames burn with an equal intensity. So too, if we can show even little acts of love, it can transform a situation, and as love spreads, it doesn’t become more thinly spread out, it becomes unstoppable.

We are all called to be people of love, who by our own lives and witness carry the torch of God’s love into other people’s lives. This is what it really should mean to be Church. It is my prayer for you all this Christmas that first, you will know the light of God’s love in your own lives and families, and second, that you’ll be able to carry light to others, by your joy, by your love, by your readiness to serve the needs of those around you.

Christians believe that God gave his everything at Christmas, that the One who is Lord of All, at the same time both at the beginning and end of time, confined himself into the life of a baby born in Bethlehem so that he might live a human life, share with us in all the tribulations and sadness, and ultimately to fight against all that is destructive, and then to conquer. In all his life, Jesus was an agent of love, passing this gift to his disciples, and sending it out across the world in them in order to reach us today. Christians have stumbled at times, and have even dropped the torch they carry by seeking power instead of service, but the good news has never truly been lost, even as Jesus promised.

The flame of God’s love cannot be quenched, and I find that it is worth every day finding time to be still, quiet and open to the movement of the Spirit, so that I may centre myself in that love, and join afresh the Jesus movement. In quietness and confidence shall be your strength” (Isaiah 30.15). May we all be able to find the space for quietness over the holidays and be enabled to face 2021 with confidence as bearers of light.

+gregory/monery