

Talk for 2nd Sunday before Lent by Phil Baker

The Gospel for this Sunday is one of the most loved and well-known passages in the Bible, the first 14 verses of St John's gospel. But we only had it back at Christmas and this year, because Easter is early, we have it again seven Sundays after Christmas. We have had all the physical stories and evidence of Jesus, the baby born in a stable and visited by shepherds and wisemen, his showing to the world at his baptism and his Presentation at the temple where he is greeted by Simeon and Anna. All these events confirm his humanity. However John reminds us of his divinity; it reminds us that Jesus, the Word was ever there at the beginning of time. Proverbs tells us that Wisdom was there at the start of time, that Word. Wisdom was with God through creation, rejoicing before God, rejoicing in His inhabited world, and delighting in humanity. Paul tells the Colossians that Christ, the first born of all creation is the image of the invisible God. Christ is divine and has always been there, but now he has been made flesh and come among us. God has revealed his light through Christ and that is what we celebrated from Christmas through to Candlemas. That divine light is throughout our scripture. It is the supreme token of God's presence and his power.

We value physical light in our world because we have experienced darkness. We know that without it we bump into things, groping around in unfamiliar places. I was always told by my father that without a star or a guiding light perhaps a compass we would just go round in circles. Early sailors learned to navigate by the north star because it was constant. We experience darkness day by day in our own lives, but we return from that spiritual and mental darkness to God's clear and bright light. We do and say stupid things that we regret, we allow minor problems to become disasters in our minds sometimes, but then in God's light we see them for what they really are and they shrink back to a manageable size. As John says, the darkness never overcame the light. You can turn light on, but you cannot turn darkness on though you can turn the light off. The light is always in control. Jesus is the light of the world and the nearer to him we move, the further from the darkness we are.

The world is in a dark place at the moment, with this pandemic, but for us there is hope. Hope in the light of Christ. This darkness cannot quench that light. We now have vaccines and, encouragingly, the infection rates are falling. There is some sort of light at the end of the tunnel, we have to persevere in our efforts to defeat it. Lent is one of the darker times of Christian year leading up to Good Friday and the awful events of that day; that day when Hope seemed to die. Lent is with us in a week and a half. This Gospel gives us a timely reminder that God does not give in to that darkness and does not let go of us. On the third day that light rises again to shine more gloriously and unquenchable than ever! The light of Christ was there at the beginning of time and is still with us today!

AMEN