

Sunday 22 January 2017, St Andrew's Church.

3rd Sunday of Epiphany

Isaiah 9.1-4; 1 Corinthians 1.10-18; Matthew 4.12-23

Light and Dark

*[T]he people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the
shadow of death
a light has dawned. [Matt. 4.16, quoting Is. 9.1,2.]*

There is so much darkness in the world, and there always has been, and until our Lord returns as He has promised, the darkness will remain.

But from the beginning there has also been light. Throughout history, no matter how dark things have been, there has always been a light shining somewhere. Wisdom, love, kindness, justice, peace – all these things have been present, like lighthouses or beacons cutting through the darkness.

We know now that this light comes from only one source – the God whom we worship.

But this was not always known. From the beginning of human history, man has wrestled with the idea of where good and evil, light and dark, come from. Perhaps goodness was granted by gods or goddesses if they were sufficiently pleased with us. Perhaps goodness was just a blind force, locked in a battle with an opposing force of evil, not knowing or caring about us.

And then, at the right time in history, God chose to answer these questions. He chose one nation, Israel, as the vehicle for revealing His true nature to the world. He gave Israel His Word, His Law and His prophets. In this way, He showed that what we experience as goodness doesn't come from gods or goddess who are pleased with our sacrifices. It isn't a blind force. Instead, goodness and light come from a living, knowing, thinking being – in other words, a person. In fact, a person whose nature it is to love us, and who wants us to love Him.

So, knowing this, we can look back on history and see with hindsight that all those beacons and lighthouses were not accidents but came from a living God

who loved his creation and kept breaking into it, to show us the way in the darkness.

But that was not the full revelation.

Through His Word and His Law and His prophets, God showed Israel what He was like. But then, God did something even greater. At the right time, again through Israel, God gave us His final and complete revelation of Himself. He took the astonishing step of actually being born into his world in the form of a human being, Jesus Christ. And through the life and death of Jesus we could finally see with total clarity what God is like. He is love itself – such love that He was willing to be born into his world and die a dreadful death for it, in order to save it.

This was light, but of a different kind. It was not like the old beacons and lighthouses shining in the night. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, applied by St Matthew to Jesus himself, this was the light of a new dawn, the light of day come at last to dispel the night completely.

This was a new light for a new creation. In Jesus, God shows us that He is not just showing us a better way in a dark world but is in fact re-creating the whole world into something new and perfect. God's kingdom is breaking into this world and transforming it in the process.

And we...how are we meant to respond?

We have a choice.

We have all experienced bad nights - long, dark, painful nights full of fears and dark thoughts. When the morning comes it brings new hope, new life, new possibilities. It brings freedom. And we can choose what to do. We can close our eyes, keep the curtains shut, turn away. Or we can get up, open the curtains wide, let the sun in and decide to live in the light. This is what Jesus meant when he said, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.' [Mt 4.17]

It is our God-given right to choose.

If we turn away from the light then we will not be part of God's new creation and will ultimately be left behind, irrelevant and useless to God.

But if we choose the new light something wonderful happens. We move beyond a struggle in the darkness to follow the lighthouses and beacons. Instead, we become the light itself. We *are* the light.

Jesus said: 'You are the light of the world...let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.' [Mt 5.14-16]

This is our joy, our duty and our privilege.

With the new light of Christ shining in and through us, we can and must go out in the world to take that light with us and become part of God's work in transforming creation.

Amen.