

## SERMON

*Rev Liz Clutterbuck*

Our gospel reading this morning is one that is often used in Christmas services. One of the nine readings in the traditional nine lessons and carols service. Whenever I hear it, it conjures up memories of listening to it being read in a dark church, lit only by candles, the smell of melting wax and of Christmas trees and an inner sense of excitement about the immanent festivities of Christmas. But even though this is a reading that many of us will connect with Christmas and the beginning of Jesus's life, it's actually a reading that takes us back, way back, all the way to the very beginning of everything. 'In the beginning was the Word'. With these words, John is taking us right back to the start of the book of Genesis. The very first words written in the Bible. That book opens, 'in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep and the spirit of God was hovering over the waters.'

John's gospel goes on to tell us, he was with God in the beginning. Through him, all things were made, without him, nothing was made that has been made. This Word, the light of all humankind, exists outside all time and space. The word was there before the world existed. The Word is bound up in creation, its history, its present and its future. The word made human in Jesus Christ, brings light into the darkness. It is a message of hope, yesterday, today and forever. To those who first heard John's gospel nearly 2000 years ago, this imagery of the Word would have connected with two different audiences. For Greeks, Logos, the Greek word for the Word, was what underpinned their understanding of the universe. And for Jews, it was a link with their understanding of wisdom, being a crucial part of creation. Our Old Testament reading this morning from Proverbs chapter eight, provides an example of wisdom at work in Judaism and in the beginning of the world. The passage we've heard, concluded with the verses that suggest that Wisdom was at God's side in the very act of creation. Then I was constantly at his side. I was filled with delight, day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in the human race. The Word goes right back to before the beginning of the world, nothing was created without it. Life was not possible without it. This life brought life to all of humanity. So the opening chapter of John's gospel, brings together this Jewish tradition of wisdom with the Logos of Greek society and then demonstrates how they have now become one in a tangible way. God made man in Jesus Christ. These verses are essentially some kind of trailer for all that will take place in the subsequent chapters of John's gospel.

How Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah, came to his own people, but was rejected. Yet, and as John writes in verses 11 and 12, to all who did receive him to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. So whether you were a Jew or a Gentile, John demonstrates that this light is for you. It is a light that brings hope for all. This is the message of the light. It is the certainty that those who receive it will become children of God. The light in the darkness is the hope of salvation, of eternity with God who created the world. I'm sure that most of us feel that we need a light of hope more than ever right now. The world can feel very dark and signs of hope, few and far between. But there are signs, vaccines for example, are bringing us all a lot of hope right now.

In the last month, one occasion that has brought light into the lives of many around the world, was the inauguration of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. At this ceremony, the youth poet Laureate, Amanda Gorman, read a poem she had written entitled, 'The hill we climb'. It begins and ends with the image of light in the darkness. I want to read you just a little bit of it, from the beginning and from the end. The beginning sets the tone for the poem that looks to hope that can be found even in the shadows of difficult circumstances, the difficult circumstances facing society.

She begins, 'when day comes, we ask ourselves, where can we find light in this never ending shade?' And then at the end, she concludes with the same theme, 'When day comes, we step out of the shade, aflame and unafraid. The new dawn blooms as we free it, for there is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it, if only we're brave enough to be it'. For there is always light. Even in the darkest months of this pandemic, there has been light, in the medical staff, working so hard to treat patients or the volunteers serving their local communities, like stars shining in a dark night sky.

Even in the darkest moments of our lives, whatever our situation, there has been light. God, who brought light into the beginning of creation, who sent his son to be light in the world, still sends his light today and forever. This at the core of the message of John chapter one. There is always light, there has always been light. There will always be light. The light existed before creation. It was a part of creation. The light came to live among humanity in the personhood of God, Jesus Christ. The light lives on through Jesus's resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit.

We are at the start of a brand new week. And I would love to offer you a challenge to take up in the coming days. Each of us face different trials in our daily lives, especially right now, but I would love to encourage you to find some time at the end of each day, to reflect upon the day that is ending and to look for the light in it. It could be something really simple like a phone call from a friend or something really significant, like the vaccination of a loved one. What has brought light into your day? Where have you seen the light of God at work? If you take on this challenge, there's a second part that you can do as well. Can you be the light in someone else's life? Is there an action that you can take, that embodies the light that Jesus has brought into our world? As John's gospel says, 'the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it'.

Amen.