

**4<sup>th</sup> January, 2015.**

**Reading: John 1: 1 - 14**

**Sermon**

On New Year's Day, I watched the Christmas Day Service from St. George's Church in Leeds. The Church was packed with people of all ages and all nationalities, people who looked as if they belonged in that Church as opposed to choirs which had been wheeled in for the television show.

There was any number of teenagers and young adults as well as older folks and in the mix was a youth pastor, a minister, an assistant minister and a student minister. They also had a cafe downstairs in which they had prepared 100 meals for people on their own on Christmas Day.

They had people in their Church from all different kinds of backgrounds. They had people who had been sleeping on the streets through addictions but who were fighting back with the help of God and the support of His people.

They had asylum seekers who inevitably would have lived through the most horrendous experiences in the countries they fled and who found love and acceptance among God's people.

They also had a band with a variety of

instruments from drums to guitar and double bass and the band members led the singing. At one stage, a group of people from the congregation shared, on national television, the difference Christmas made in their lives. It was so uplifting.

At a carol service a couple of weeks before, Joanna Seabourne preached on Light, which was also the theme of the Christmas Day Service. She preached on one of the phrases which was used to describe Jesus, namely, the light of the world, words from John's Gospel, chapter 1, which we read this morning. The light was coming into the world, the true light which gives light to every person was coming into the world and I want to share with you some of her thoughts this morning.

The word 'light' is an amazing word and a very helpful word to use to describe Jesus because we all know what light is and we have got used to light. We have got so used to light that when we walk into a room and it is dark, we switch the light on and the light shines but it wasn't always like that.

At one point, if you lived in London, or in any of the big cities for that matter, you wouldn't have gone out on the streets at night because it was too dangerous. There was no such thing as a street lamp but if you had a bit of money, you might have paid a

boy to walk ahead of you with a stick with tar on it which was alight. It was quite a dangerous job for these boys but it was only wealthy could enjoy that privilege. It was, however, still dangerous because it was so dark.

However, in 1807, a man called Frederick Windsor decided that he wanted to do something special to celebrate the birthday of King George III. He was going to do it by setting up gas lamps all along Pall Mall and he organised it so that the minute he lit the spark, all the gas lamps would come on to the oohing and aahing of the people as they looked on in amazement.

There were thousands of people there to look at the gas lamps and in time, they put them all across London. There were a few explosions along the way but they perfected the system in the end and the streets were lit. People could finally walk outside at night.

There was a popular newspaper at the time called the Westminster Review and it said that the introduction of gas lamps had done more to reduce immorality and criminality on our streets than all the sermons that were ever preached. What was that about?

It was because you cannot hide in the light.

Those who wanted to do the deeds of darkness could no longer hide. Nothing was hidden. Light revealed where people were and what they were up to.

When Jesus came into the world, when He brought light into our world, he revealed what was in our hearts. The things that were in our hearts could no longer be hidden. The things that we had done, or that others had done to us, could no longer be hidden. They were exposed by the light or brought out into the open. The light revealed our need, our need of a Saviour, but it also revealed the Father's heart of love and the love He has for each one of us.

Light does other things as well as reveal things. Joanna spoke of a family trip she went on. They were going to climb a mountain. It was a beautiful day, sunshine and blue sky.

They had plenty of food with them so there was no chance of them going hungry. However, as they climbed up the hill, they suddenly wondered if they had enough time to reach the top. When they met a walker coming the other way, they asked him that question. 'Do we have enough time to reach the top?' 'Of course you have enough time', he said, 'if you use your torches', and he walked on.

They knew at that moment that they didn't have enough time to complete the walk in daylight and they realised that although they had plenty of food, they had no torches. They hadn't even thought about torches in the bright summer sunshine, so they had to head back down the hill without completing the journey.

They couldn't complete the walk because light guides us. Light shows us where to put our feet. It is important to help us not stumble and Jesus came to guide us. Jesus says: I came that you may know life and life in all its fulness. Jesus says: To know that life, follow me, walk in my footsteps. So light reveals and light guides.

Now, we may feel that that is all very well but we've seen the news this week and have heard all the awful things which are happening around the world. We may also have listened to people around us who are suffering. We may know people who are ill or who are dying. We will be aware that there are people in our world who are hungry and who are homeless and when we look at all that is happening, the darkness can seem overwhelming, totally overwhelming.

However, when we talk about light and darkness, we are not comparing two equal things. No matter

how dark it gets, one tiny spark can still be seen because light shines in the darkness. Jesus came and he was born as a baby, a tiny living creature who brought joy after the pain of childbirth. He brought light into the darkness of that dirty, lonely stable but the story didn't end there.

Jesus lived a life which demonstrated God's love for us but He also died. There is a song which we're going to sing in a moment which talks of the wise men and the gifts they brought for Jesus. They brought gifts which shed some light on the life that Jesus was going to lead. They brought gold because he was a king. They brought frankincense, another gift fit for a king and myrrh, which was a special oil used to anoint the dead when they were being prepared for burial.

Our song speaks of Jesus sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying, sealed in the stone-cold tomb. When we sing those words, it sounds as if the darkness has put out the light but that was not the end of the story.

The next verse speaks of the resurrection. Jesus rose again and we sing of the resurrection because the light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. The light triumphs. However dark it may feel, the light still breaks through.

Sometimes, however, we live as if we can chase the darkness away ourselves. It's a bit like running around in a room and trying to chase the darkness out when actually all we need to do is switch the light on. The light is what dispels the darkness.

He comes as a light to push back the darkness in our lives. Jesus comes as a light to reveal our need. He comes as a light to guide our footsteps and He comes as a light which triumphs which means at the end of the day, we have a choice to make.

We can choose to allow Jesus, the Light, to reveal to us our need of God and His love for us or we can choose to hide in the shadows. We can choose to allow Jesus, the Light, to guide our footsteps showing us a way ahead that leads to life or we can try and do it on our own. We can walk in the light, celebrating its triumph or we can continue to fear the darkness.

However, the truth is that stepping into the light doesn't mean that everything is going to be easy and that everything is going to be ok but it does mean that we know the Light walking beside us. We know the next step and we know that we are not on our own. We also know that we have an eternal promise of a life to come where there will be no more dying or mourning or pain or sorrow for the Light has

triumphed. The picture we are given of that eternal life is one in which there is no night because God gives light.

That is the difference that Christmas makes in all our lives when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour and trust our lives to Him.

The decorations will be put away in the next twenty-four hours and in one sense Christmas will be over for another year but the message remains. Do we pack it away as well or do we allow the light into our lives and follow the light to eternal life? That choice is ours but it's a choice which will impact on the community around us. If we reflect the love and the acceptance of our God, our Church will grow just like the Church in Leeds. That choice is ours to make at the start of this new year.