

## **The Third Sunday before Lent 2020**

### **'A City built on a Hill'**

**Whenever I look at the readings for a Sunday, and especially those for which I have to write a sermon, I always hope that a word or phrase will 'jump out at me'. A word or phrase around which I can develop the theme.**

**There, in the Gospel reading from Matthew, are the words:**

**'A city built on a hill cannot be hidden.'**

**On a visit to the Holy Land, some years ago now, I can still hear the voice of our guide saying these words as we returned to Jerusalem, after a day out, as the sun was setting. As we swept round a bend, there was Jerusalem on a hill lit up by the dying from rays of the sun.**

**The readings from Isaiah, the Psalm 112 and Matthew are linked by the Epiphany symbol of 'light'. They call for and celebrate a life of faithfulness in the world and in our communities, where faith should be seen to be practised, especially in addressing social injustice.**

**Isaiah 58 mocks a worship preoccupied with ritual and blind to human oppression. True worship occurs when our worship is linked with a hands-on involvement with the hungry and the homeless, those who need our help. This underlines Jesus telling His disciples that they are:**

**'the light of the world' and the 'salt of the earth.'**

**Light and salt are both essential to life – they have a function, an impact on the surrounding environment. Salt seasons food and light pushes back the darkness. Salt is a cleansing agent and a preservative. In a corrupt society, disciples are to be distinctive by their high moral standards. Salt also gives flavour. In an apathetic and negative society, they are to bring out the good news – the truth, mercy and peace of God. No more could the people of Israel of Isaiah's day retreat into a private spirituality. Their call, as was that of the disciples, was to witness to their faith in practical ways that can be seen by the world.**

**Salt can lose its saltiness if left too long and lights which are hidden are of no use.**

**Light can expose what many would prefer to remain hidden. It illuminates the darkness and enables people to find their way, to do their work, to see each other clearly, to appreciate the beauty of creation.**

**Light can expose what many would prefer to remain hidden.**

**Without being too political here, I do think we should be aware of and monitoring any moves to curtail the freedom of our press and especially perhaps the work of some of our very able investigative journalists and the independence of the BBC – I would just reference the attempt made by 10 Downing Street last week to be selective about which journalists could be present at a particular news briefing – this led to all the journalists leaving as those selected were not willing to stay on these terms.**

**As one commentator writes:**

**‘The mindset and lifestyle of the disciple should bring the Christ-light to bear on every aspect of human life. However, just as lamplight can be masked by a cover, so the disciple’s impact can be overshadowed by other preoccupations.’**

**From Isaiah:**

**‘Why do you fast, but you do not see? Why humble yourselves, but you do not notice?’**

**‘Is not the fast I choose ..... to share your bread with the hungry, bring the homeless poor into your house, when you see the naked cover them.... Then your light shall break forth like the dawn and your healing shall spring up quickly.....’**

**There is an urgency about this; it is not so much a matter of making up our minds as that of acting quickly, of doing that which can be most beneficial in the situation.**

**Perhaps we would do well to remember:**

**‘Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today.’ – not always so easy to achieve.**

**However, Jesus also says that these ‘good works’ that are visible should give glory to God.**

**We hear these words many times:**

**'Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.'**

**Christ's followers are to be a community of faithful witnesses but unlike the scribes and Pharisees, not just keeping to the letter of the law so their 'goodness' will be noticed, but fulfilling the spirit of the law as well.**

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote:**

**'Any community of Jesus which wants to be invisible is no longer a community that follows Him'.**

**In the reading from Corinthians, Paul challenges those who, while professing faith in Christ, still cling to the values of the world – in particular its demand for glory and status.**

**As we have a Baptism this morning, and we very much welcome the Grierson family and especially Abigail and Noah, the very newest member of our Church family, I wanted to end by looking at the references to water in Isaiah.**

**We are assured that if we continue to help those in need in our society; when we feed the hungry and care for the homeless, then God will continue to supply our needs. If we live according to God's way, this will bring about a rehabilitation of society in general.**

**'We shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.'**

**Water, as we all know is essential to life. In many parts of the world it is such a precious commodity that wars have been fought over it. Lack of it leads to droughts, disease and starvation.**

**In Baptism, it is used as a symbol of cleansing and a new life in Christ – the first step to becoming a member of the body of Christ, which is the Church. The Baptism candle symbolises the light of Christ.**

**The final verse of the hymn 'chosen' for Noah is:**

**The Spirit lives in you and me, walk, walk in the light.**

**His light will shine for all to see, walk, walk in the light. Amen.**

**Gillian Gyenes LLM.**