

Morningside

Sermon

10.30am

15/3/26

Laetare Sunday
Light of the World

John 9:1-41

A week or so ago at the funeral of that prophetic religious and political maverick Jesse Jackson, former President Barak Obama, in true statesman-like words, told the congregation that the world is living in a time when it is hard to hope. He talked about the American situation where in his judgement there seemed to be new assaults on democratic institutions and yet more setbacks to the idea of the rule of law, nationally and internationally. He believed that these behaviour patterns lived out not by a few but by many were an offence to common decency. He wondered why it was that we, across the world and not just in the United States, appear to be forced into fearing each other and turning against each other. A world where everywhere we see greed and bigotry being celebrated, and bullying and mockery masquerading as strength. Where ignorance, dishonesty, cruelty and corruption appeared to reap untold rewards.

Where is the hope? Where is the peace? Where is the future? Where is the light?

"I am the light of the world", says Jesus.

I know many of you, like me, have been struggling over the past months trying not simply to make sense of what is going on in our world, and the current war is only one area of hope-sapping news, there are many others. Why does everything feel so hard, so tough, so bleak at the moment? A war, this....*excursion*...., this breaking of international law, the Middle East bombed and aflame with no clear strategy for purpose or outcome, based on reckless improvisation and political amateurism. 160 children killed in a school, and more in the towns and cities of Iran and in Beirut and beyond.

A world's economy aflame because of the knock-on effects of the war and some profiteering in oil markets because of it; with no-one, apparently, having given much thought to what would happen to the world when a war was launched next to an area where around a fifth of the world's oil is transported. And now Russia, *Russia*, still lacerating Ukraine, is being let off their murderous hook with sanctions being eased, which will not promote peace in that forgotten but ongoing conflict.

The centre of Glasgow aflame, again, and people feeling their city is gradually disappearing and uncertainty about how or when, or if, it will be rebuilt.

It is into a smoke and cloud-shrouded world that Jesus Christ comes. Again, and again, and again. A world where fear and weariness and confusion and anger swirl and obscure so much that we hold dear and value highly. A world where the temptation is often to believe that we can't cope any more, that it is all too much, that there is nothing that can be done and that all that is left is to give up and slink away.

Where is the hope? Where is the peace? Where is the future? Where is the light?

"I am the light of the world", says Jesus.

We live in a world where it is hard to hope, and hard to see light. Yet into this hopeless, darksome world light still comes, without excuse, without fanfare, without apology. Into a world where the dreams of women, men and children are pulverised, Jesus the light of the world still comes. Not without a twinkle in his eye the late Desmond Tutu once said, "If your dreams turn to dust, vacuum."

If your brightness turns to darkness, turn to the light of the world.

If your future feels forsaken, turn to the light of the world.

If your dreams turn to nightmares, turn to the light of the world.

In this Church none of us may have the power or expertise or influence to change the course of world events, but we can model the gracious, generous living of our lives that our tiny actions here in this place might tiptoe across our community, our city, our country, our world until that time when joined up with others, we, the people, we, the little lights of today, may create such a determined blaze of kindness, generosity, inclusion and an insistence on peace with justice that the leaders of nations and international companies, and every one at every top table may listen to what we are saying, and respond to what our world is needing.

The light we shine is not ours, but that of Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. Not for darkness have we been made, but for light. Not for despair, but hope. Not for scarcity, but abundance. Not for selfishness, but sharing. Not for war, but for peace. Not for hatred, but for love. If we don't step up, no-one else will. If we don't speak up, no-one else will. If we don't model peace in our homes and workplace, our Church and the places we live our lives, then the world is fractured. If we don't shine the Christ light, then we add to these devil-darkened of these days.

The wonderful reading from John's gospel this morning is one of the best-told stories in the whole of the Bible. The scenes are smoothly connected; characters unfold before our eyes; questions are employed in a timely fashion; and above all, the crisp dialogue, ironic at almost every point, unveils the satire of a blind man who comes to see and sees people who proves themselves to be blind.

This story from early in Jesus' ministry raises powerful questions for us who maybe identify with the different characters. Do you identify with the man born blind who gained his sight and, despite pressure and rejection, also found faith when healing and hope came? Do you identify with the curious yet unobservant neighbours, who had passed by the blind man and only now truly looked at him, these bystanders to miracles. Maybe you identify with the sceptical Pharisees, unwilling to accept that miraculous things might happen, but whose real struggle is that something has

happened beyond their understanding and control. Or do you stand with the intimidated parents, fearing what the truth of their son's healing might bring about to him, to them?

See also how in the story, after the healing, Jesus is physically absent. As soon as the blind man goes to wash in the pool of Siloam, Jesus disappears and does not reappear until the blind man is thrown out of the synagogue. And yet in His absence Jesus is the main issue at stake. How do characters respond to Him? With honesty and increasing knowledge? With curiosity? With fear? With anger and threats.

Jesus is still the main issue at stake in human life. Jesus reappeared just as the blind man was about to be thrown out of life again, and was offered the possibility of faith, and light with it, alongside the sight he had regained. It was there, on the outside, on the fringe of things, that the light of Jesus shone, and with that light, came a sense of hope.

Where is the hope? Where is the peace? Where is the future? Where is the light?

"I am the light of the world", says Jesus.

The light is always there, even in the darkest of times. Perhaps especially in the darkest of times. Sometimes we feel it is hidden from us, as we find ourselves on the fringe of life because of age, too young, too old; or ill health; or depression; or frustrated weakness at not being able to change our world; or lack of money; or no job; or gender; or lifestyle choices; or because we are Christians in an apparently unbelieving world.

On Friday afternoon I came in to Church, to clear my head after a week full of too many things, good and bad. I was halfway through writing this sermon and had got stuck. Maybe you've noticed! I find in this sanctuary a kind of contained openness. Walls soaked in decades of prayer; a building suffused with so many kind actions and generous people like you, doing wonderful things, week in, week out. I can *feel it*.

I walked down the aisles - the south one - and looked at the windows of Mary and Elizabeth, Ninian and Columba, the children and so on. And then down the north aisle until I found myself stopping. There He was, as He has been in this Church since 1939, on the eve of another war. Jesus, the Light of the World. Holding His lantern. Helping blind eyes see. Illuminating pathways of hope for generations in this building. Go too fast and you'll miss Him. You have to slow down to see this lantern-bearing Saviour. You have to look out for Him. But there He is. Shining gently in here for 87 years.

In this time of darkness, where is the hope? Where is the peace? Where is the future? Where is the light?

"I am the light of the world", says Jesus. Right there. Right here. Right now. And so we go on. In His light.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen