

Trinity Baptist Church
Thursday 31st December 2020 – Watchnight service @ 11.30 pm
John 1:1-5, 9-14
The Light Shines In The Darkness And The Darkness Has Not Overcome It

[Read John 1:1-5, 9-14]

1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was with God in the beginning. 3Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. 5The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it ...

9The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. 11He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – 13children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

14The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

[Pray]

Well, what a year it has been! Last year at this service, I spoke about the need for the Church to change and adapt to remain alive – but I had no idea just how much, how frequently or how quickly we would have to change and adapt this year! The same, of course, has been true in society at large. Covid-19 has brought so much pain and sorrow, so much uncertainty and fear, so much isolation and depression, so much poverty and insecurity, so much change and unpredictability. To use a biblical word, it has brought darkness to our lives.

There have, of course, been movements of light and hope in the midst of it all: like the solidarity at the start of lockdown as we stood and clapped our wonderful NHS staff and other keyworkers; like the inspirational efforts of Captain Tom Moore's walking challenge or Marcus Rashford's campaign against child poverty; and, though borne out of tragic circumstances, like the growing refusal to continue to accept racial injustice and White supremacy – a struggle in which we must persevere. Yet, *my* assessment of this year is that it has been far more dark than light. Again, this time last year, I spoke of the need, in the midst of unsettling change, to look constantly to Jesus Christ as the firm anchor for our lives. Little did I know just how much we would need that anchor this year.

1) In *him* is life

And that is again clearly stated in our passage today (v.4): "In *him* was life, and that life was the light of all people." If we want life, if we want light, we have to go to *him*, because in *him* is life, which is light for all. Who are we talking about? The eternal Word, who is both with God, and is himself God. The Word through whom the world was made. The Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus Christ. In *him* is life and in him alone.

In him alone is *spiritual* life, certainly: "to those who believed in *his* name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born

of God.” But in him is also physical life and mental life and emotional life, because he is our Creator and Sustainer for all the days ordained for us. In the coming year, when Covid remains a real threat to life, it’s important that we remember this. Our hope, ultimately, is not in a vaccine, vital as they are. Our hope is not in medicine or hospital treatment, blessing though it is to have it available free at the point of need. Our hope is not in the mere avoidance of physical death, though none of us would wish to go before our time. Our hope is in Jesus Christ. For in *him* is life. And in him is life sufficient to overcome everything that might rob us of life, both in this life and in eternity.

So, whilst we rightly do all we can to protect ourselves and others, and whilst we rightly celebrate our medical staff and other key workers who sacrifice of themselves to help preserve our lives, yet we put our trust in God, in Jesus Christ, to give us life and preserve our life. He is our true hope – he and he alone! Amen?

2) The light shines in the darkness ...

But there is another word of encouragement here for us in our dark world – v.5: “The light shines in the darkness ...” He shines his light in four clear ways. He shines his light through his beautiful and dynamic creation – which daily displays new expressions of his glory. As Paul writes in Romans 1:20, “since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.” Some of us, this year, have appreciated having more time to enjoy God’s creation with our families – and that’s a blessing to thank him for.

Then he shines his light through his revealed Word, the Bible. Psalm 119:105 says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light for my path.” If we want the light of life in our lives, we need to go to his Word every day.

Thirdly he shines his light, supremely, through the life death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. John 1:9: “The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.” If we really want to know the character of our Father God, we need to meditate deeply on the character of Jesus, for Jesus said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

But the last source of light for God’s dark world is perhaps the most surprising: His light is seen through us, his people. Jesus said to his followers, “*You* are the light of the world ... let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt 5:14,16). Through our love for others, we have the privilege and responsibility to demonstrate who God is and what he is like. And, not only to demonstrate, but also to *speak* his word of life to them, that they might have the privilege of knowing God for themselves.

3) And the darkness has not overcome it

“The light shines in the darkness ...” and just as important, especially for this year: “and the darkness has not overcome it.” Has not, will not, cannot overcome it. Our God is stronger. Our God is greater. Do you believe that? Nothing can prevent God from fulfilling his plans for the world. His creation, his word, the revelation of his Son, his people, continue to shine his light in the darkness, and the darkness will *never* overcome that light.

In fact, darkness cannot overcome light. The darker the darkness around the light, the brighter the light appears to shine in the midst of that darkness. God can use this time to bring people to himself. He can do that with or without our help. But he wants to involve us in that process – through our intercessory prayers, and through our willingness to spread his light in the world by our deeds and by our words. How brightly are you willing to shine this year? How willing are you to allow God to refine your life to make you more reflective of Jesus Christ's light? How willing are you to pray and pray and keep on praying for his kingdom to come, his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven? It may look like the darkness is winning right now. But the light still shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Amen? Hold on to that hope in 2021!

[Pray]