

YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Thank you to the churches of Rochester Diocese, Christmas 2021

If Jesus Christ be Son of God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too big for me to make for him.

The beauty of the Gospel expressed in the words of a once famous test cricketer.

And in one sentence lies the paradoxical comfort and challenge of being a follower of Jesus. Our lives are hid with Christ in God. But he calls us to the edgy daily task of giving those lives away to others.

That's service.

And it feels especially hard when your own needs are as great, if not greater, than those you are serving.

That's one reason why so many Christian people feel tired right now. They are not the only people who feel this way, by a long way. Across the UK is a huge swathe of people who have stepped up to the front line day after day so the rest of us could live more safely and comfortably.

Covid asks followers of Jesus to keep on giving out even though they feel the same anxiety, experience the same privation and suffer the same illness as everyone else.

I want to express my gratitude to, and admiration of, the churches of Rochester Diocese. Despite the worry and the uncertainty of 2021, you have stepped up to your own front line without flinching. And across our communities are many whose lives have been enriched by that commitment; and many actions that will find their place in the coming kingdom.

We are beguiled by light at this time of year, using it literally and symbolically to scatter the darkness.

Jesus is well known for saying: 'I am the light of the world'. Sometimes, we forget his further claim. Here he does not say: 'You *could be* the light of the world' or: 'You *might be* the light of the world'. Instead he says: 'You *are* the light of the world'.

When the Holy Spirit is present in a person, in a community, this light will shine out without us even being conscious of it. It is one of the most romantic and mysterious components of our faith.

One famous comedian once said: eighty percent of success in life is just turning up. There is a lot of truth in this. But when the rules have permitted, just turning up has asked for more courage and determination than perhaps ever before. And you did it. That's the incarnation. And you continue to do it. Thank you, as a brother in Christ.

Simon Burton-Jones

Bishop of Tonbridge

December 2021