

Haverhill Methodist Church – Worship at Home
Sunday 10th January 2021

Welcome Message – Revd. Peter Goodhall

Today we continue to rejoice in the light of God, which shines upon us. We listen for God's voice. When God speaks, good things happen, as we shall see in our Bible readings today. God is our Saviour and mighty deliverer, the life and hope of all people. With gladness and thankfulness let us worship.

Hymn/Song

Gathering Prayer

Lord God, giver of light and life,
by your word you bring everything into being –
the far-flung galaxies and the tiniest atomic particle.
You have given us a world to enjoy and to care for.
Give us compassion in the use of its resources,
wisdom in our stewardship of your gifts,
and reverence for all that you have made – for Jesus' sake.
Amen.

Bible Readings

Genesis Chapter 1 verses 1-5

Mark Chapter 1 verses 4-11

Prayer of confession

God called the light out of darkness and saw that it was good.
By his light we see what is true, what is lovely, what is beautiful.
In that light he created us, and called us to be his people.
His voice claims us as his own, his beloved sons and daughters.
He tears open the heavens to come with his Spirit and fill us with
his life. In that Spirit let us respond in prayer, in praise and in
worship. We bring to you, Lord Jesus, our burdens and our joys.
We offer you the sadness and the joy we have experienced this
week.
We bring to you our fears and hopes, for ourselves and for others.

Forgive our brokenness and frailty, our thoughtlessness and negligence, and those times we know we might have behaved better. Have mercy upon us, as we turn from our sins, and turn towards your promise of new life.

Lord Jesus, give us the blessing of your peace.

Amen.

Hymn/Song

Sermon

I begin by telling you about two events in British history.

On the eve of the first world war, Sir Edward Grey the British foreign secretary was looking out of his Whitehall office window watching the lamplighter lighting the gas street lamps below.

The increasing light was in stark contrast to the darkness of war, which loomed large.

This moment inspired Edward Grey to say to his friend

"The lamps are going out all over Europe;
we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime."

A second event of history happened during another war, centuries earlier - the English civil war between Oliver Cromwell's Roundheads and the Royalists who supported King Charles 1st.

In 1642 at Winchester in Hampshire, Cromwell's soldiers, angry at being unpaid, looted the city and its ancient cathedral.

They rode on horseback into the cathedral, raised their muskets and fired at the beautiful stained glass windows.

We can only imagine the terrible sight and sound of those colourful medieval windows being shattered and smashed to bits, destroyed and lost forever.

The people of Winchester were powerless to prevent it.

There we have two stories, which express the darkness of human sin and pain.

What do they say to us in our situation today of a global pandemic?

The sad words of Sir Edward Grey echo down the years.

This very day, in 2021, the lamps are going out all over Europe, and, indeed, beyond Europe, to the far reaches of the globe.

With each death from Coronavirus, a lamp goes out.

In each isolated household, a lamp has gone out.

It is the lamp of human contact, the lamp of shared laughter, the lamp of community life, the lamp of family cohesiveness.

What of the future? Edward Grey understood that life would never be the same again. "We shall not see them lit again in our lifetime." Sure enough, 1939 came around and the Second World War began. A blackout was ordered and that same darkness grew deeper. The darkness of that war was only ended by the lethal light of the atomic bombs over Japan.

Wars and battles change everything. Our global battle against Coronavirus, a different but equally lethal airborne enemy, continues today and lives and futures are changing and being shaped. Shattered dreams lie at our feet like that broken glass of Winchester Cathedral. What, then, is God's word for us today? Genesis chapter one describes God's work of creation and transformation. The earth B.C. (Before Creation) is described there as chaos, waste, darkness. Does that sound all too familiar?

Yet in the beginning, the Spirit of God was 'hovering' or 'fluttering' on the face of the waters. The same word is used in Deuteronomy Chapter 32 verse 11, which pictures God redeeming his people from Egypt like an eagle hovering over its young.

Then God said 'Let there be light' and light scattered the darkness. We affirm today that the same Spirit of God is hovering over our present chaos, and something new is coming to birth.

God has not abandoned us.

We affirm that God is still speaking to our world.

God, the creator of light, is still saying 'Let there be light'.

Let the lamps that have gone out be relit.

Let them be lit again in our lifetime.

How we need the good light of God.

Today we prophesy over God's world 'Let there be light'.

Let there be light to warm cold hearts, let there be light to comfort all who are troubled, let there be light to befriend the lonely, let there be light to awaken faith in God, let there be light to illumine the minds of parents and children in their home schooling, let there be light to heal bodies broken by disease, let there be light to guide our leaders, let there be light to bring order out of chaos, let there be light to highlight our mistakes and let there be light to liberate our lockdown.

Let there be light in your life and my life.

Let us dream new dreams and seek new vision.

The people of Winchester in the 17th Century did just that.

They couldn't stop the destruction in their Cathedral.

But they salvaged and kept the broken glass from those stained glass windows.

There was no way of piecing it all back just as it was.

But pieces of glass of all shapes, sizes and colours were collected and lovingly fixed together and randomly placed in the frame of the old west window. A jumble of angel wings, disciples and kings became a new creation.

And nearly 20 years after that dark night of destruction, light shone through those windows once more.

Let there be light! And it was good.

Sunlight still shines through those windows to this day.

It tells a new story.

One day I might just see it for myself.

There is a lesson for us here.

Sometime soon, somehow, we have to believe that we can make something out of this current mess; the chaos and the waste, and that we will each play our part to reshape the world to be a healthier, kinder, fairer, more just place for all people.

We might feel powerless to stop the destruction of Coronavirus, but we can each pick up the fragments of our shattered dreams and treasure them enough to make something new, something different from what we lost, yet something beautiful. It will take time.

We might not have 20 years, but little did the people of Winchester know that their recreation would still bless and inspire people almost 400 years later. We rebuild for future generations.

We partner with Jesus Christ, the master builder and restorer.

The Spirit of God hovered over the waters at his baptism.

He plunged into the waters of our life, into our human suffering and disease, even into the cold waters of death to resurrection life.

He is making all things new. He speaks words of life.

A songwriter has said of Jesus:

Every time you open up your mouth

Another miracle comes out

The blind can finally start to see

The lame are rising up, dancing on their feet

When you speak the dead awake

Walls start to break

I find my place

The universe can't help but listen

When you speak

*So why should I ever fear
If my Maker is standing near?*

(Lyrics from the song 'When You Speak' by The Color)

In this Covenant Service we recall our own baptismal promises, made for us or by us. We belong to Christ, the Light of the world. He says "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and praise and give glory to your Father who is in heaven". Let us listen for the voice of God speaking in 2021. And listening, let us look within us and beyond us for the signs of new life and creativity, which shall surely follow. To God's praise and glory, Amen.

Hymn/Song

Prayers of Intercession

Lord, who created order from the chaos, bring light to darkness.

Lord, hear our prayer.

In places of war and conflict, where there is famine and suffering, where we struggle to see how we can make a difference, bring light to darkness.

Lord, hear our prayer.

In our own communities, for those who are poor, for the homeless and hungry, for the lonely and the prisoner, bring light to darkness.

Lord, hear our prayer.

In those whose lives are made harder by illness ..., and those who search for peace and cannot find it, bring light to darkness.

Lord, hear our prayer.

In the lives of those who are grieving ..., bring light to darkness.

Lord, hear our prayer.

In the lives of those we live with, those we work with and those we play with, and for ourselves, bring light to darkness.

Lord, hear our prayer. Amen.

Unite your prayers with the whole church as you pray
The Lord's Prayer. 'Our Father...'

Hymn/Song

The Blessing

We offer our lives and our gifts to the Lord.

Living Lord, we thank you that we are called to be a community of your new creation, bound together by your peace. Help us to listen for the voice of the Spirit in all we do this week, and to tell the story of life that is found in you, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. May the blessing of God rest upon us and may the light of God lead us on.

Amen.

Coffee Time Conversation

- Name the lamps that have gone out for you.
- What do you take from today's message?
- How do you hear God's voice speaking to you?

Suggested Hymns and Songs

More Traditional Music:

Though whose almighty word
Lead kindly light
O Jesus I have promised

More Contemporary Music:

Great is the darkness that covers the earth
'Move' by Jesus Culture
Hear the call of the kingdom

Keep social distancing.
Keep safe.
Keep communicating.
God bless you and keep you until we meet again.
My prayers are with you.

With love,

Peter