

Jesus the Light of the World

In 1973 Stevie Wonder released a song that became one of his big hits....

You are the Sunshine of my life....

*You are the sunshine of my life
That's why I'll always be around
You are the apple of my eye
Forever you'll stay in my heart*

Songwriters and poets and lyricists are able to use metaphor to express something about their love or longing or desire.

Can you remember the song Morecambe and Wise used to sing at the end of their shows?

*Bring me sunshine
In you smile*

It includes the lines...

*Let your arms be as warm as the sun from up above
Bring me fun, bring me sunshine, bring me love....*

If songs had to be literally true, the lyrics would be very boring indeed.

You cannot bring people sunshine!
And it's not possible for someone to be the sunshine of your life because you would burn to a crisp if they were!!

But songwriters get away with it because we value what they are trying to say and we might want to say

something similar. Whatever attributes we might say sunshine has – that's what you are to me.
I knew of a Liverpudlian woman who had an expression she used to let someone know how special they were to her.

You're my world.

Feel free to use that with those special to you.

In the opening verses of John's gospel, John creates lyrics to champion and proclaim the truth about Jesus Christ. The rest of the Gospel explains these astonishing claims. It's like a kaleidoscope with one metaphor tumbling over another and all jostling together as John seeks to proclaim the unique wonder of Jesus Christ.

Today we begin a series looking closely at who Jesus is. We want to understand him better as a man – his humanity - but also his divinity and uniqueness. The aim is not an academic study at the end of which we might feel better informed, but otherwise no different. The aim is transformation. As we draw close to the light our true identity in Christ is also revealed.

As one of the planning team put it neatly. Christ's identity and our identity in Christ.

Our Gospel writer is facing a problem. Most of the early church were Jews and Jews had been waiting hundreds of years for the nation to be saved by the Messiah. The best way of introducing Jews to the truth of Jesus was to demonstrate that he was the Messiah.

But the Greek people were not waiting for a Messiah. They had no concept that they needed to be saved.

How could John introduce Jesus in a way that would explain who he was and open up for them the need for a personal faith in Jesus?

He hits upon "The Word" which was a powerful metaphor for both Jews and Greeks. He also uses, Life and Light and other ideas and concepts to gain the attention of those who are not waiting for the Messiah.

For Jews, Words had a power of their own. Once spoken, they set about their purpose. Psalm 33:6 – By the Word of the Lord, the heavens were made. By the Word.

For Greeks, they had a concept of the Logos (Greek for Word) which was the mind of reason behind the ordering of the universe. They observed stars moving in a set order, seasons come and go, nature following rhythms...behind all this was the mind of reason...Logos

John, boldly combines these two philosophical concepts and says – I'm going to introduce you to The Word.

v.14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

It is an astonishing concept. That the creative power of the Word was with God and was God and was the agent of creation. And this Logos has become like us and, to quote the Message, moved into the neighbourhood.

Having captured the attention of both Jews and Greeks by referring to Jesus as "The Word" John introduces his two great themes for the Gospel. Life and Light.

How can he say that in Jesus was life? We all, already have life. I'm alive. You alive.

But John is speaking of eternal life, life to the very full, the life of God given to us. He uses "Life" 36 times, more than twice as often as any other gospel.

In effect he will go on to say that we exist; but it's as if we exist in black and white like the first televisions. It's as if we have no sense of smell and have never heard music. The life that we have now slowly and inevitably leads to separation from God and destruction but that's not what God wants – so He sent his son.

It's set out in just one verse - John 3:16

Eternal life is an invitation to share God's own life now. Eternal can sound kind of scary because the idea of just going on forever as things are now is not appealing, but the point is it's NOT life as we know it now, it's the discovery of God's own life of love shared with us as fully as we are able to receive it.

I don't think any of us are SO blessed we can't take any more blessing. I don't think any of us are so filled with grace and shalom that we would refuse any more. John's gospel would suggest there is so much more LIFE for us to experience, we have only scratched the surface.

And into his kaleidoscope of metaphors he introduces his other great theme – Light.

This Gospel deliberately echoes the opening of Genesis – In the beginning...and in the beginning God creates

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light. This light does three things. It puts chaos to flight. The chaos of formless empty darkness is banished. The light reveals things as they truly are. The light guides so that we can know where we are going.

This light shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it.

Later in the Gospel John will recall seven sayings that Jesus made – two come to mind today

I am the way, the truth and the Life.
I am the light of the World.

What might we take from this today?

I think the first thing is to be aware of the need to listen before we speak.

John chooses appropriate ways of communicating the Gospel, but unless we listen and are aware of the needs and issues in others lives, we won't know what to say. It's pointless telling someone they need to be saved if they don't feel lost.

The story that is always relevant – is your story of your experience of God's grace.

Which then gives reason to consider our experience of Jesus Christ and the Life he offers and the Light he offers. I said earlier I don't think any of us have more than enough...so how might we experience his life and light more in 2019?

Today is Epiphany (not that I've focussed on it at all) and traditionally it's the day we read of the wise men

completing their journey and worshipping the infant Jesus. It's the realisation of who Jesus truly is and how that transforms life as we know it.

I wonder if 2019 might be a year of Epiphany? Christ's light showing us new truth? His Life filtering more fully into ours?

I think there are two elements to gaining more.

The first step is simply to want it. After all Immanuel is God coming to us, seeking us, reaching out to us. Our response is to be open and want more. I want to know more, and experience more.

The second is to journey – like the wise men. Your journey will include new experiences and opportunities and they will present themselves to you....

Lent course.
Quiet Day.
Series of readings.
Prayer events.
Small groups.

Ultimately...the more we draw close to Jesus Christ, the more the truth of God is revealed to us.

No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son,^[a] who is close to the Father's heart,^[b] who has made him known.

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