

Sermon 4 – Living in the Light of Christ

The Feast of Candlemas 2022

Isaiah 42. 1-9 Luke 2. 22-40

Recap of the last 3 Epiphany sermons:

1: *Being Shown and Being Changed.* God is always at work all around us. Our role is to notice what he is showing us through all our experiences, to come alongside God and get involved in what he is doing, and to be prepared be changed in the process.

2: *Faith in Community.* The very first thing Jesus does with his new disciples in John's gospel is to take them to a party where the whole community is. Our ministry is about being in the community, beyond our church walls. God-with-Us calls us to be with others. Our own Mission Statement talks of "serving the people of Kidlington and Hampton Poyle for their own sake".

3. *A Church Gathered Around Jesus.* From worship with Christ at the centre, we are sent out to those on the edges of society. A vision of the church as 'Simpler, Humbler and Bolder' may be a church that is deeper in faith and more Godly.

We have looked back at where Covid has left us: bruised, scattered, weary, angry, frustrated, and more divided than before. This week we look forward with hope and trust and confidence. Biblical images resonate: the desert breaking into flower, broken ruins being rebuilt, (Isaiah 35.1; 58.12; 61.4) and St Paul: "we are persecuted but not abandoned; we are struck down but not destroyed" (2 Cor 4. 9).

At our centre is Christ is our good news, our nourishment and our strength. And he has promised 'I will be with you'.

Living in and as the Light of Christ

So this week we think about Living **in** the light of Christ and living **as** the light of Christ. Living **in** the light is about receiving the blessing, healing, protection of Christ. Living **as** the light is about how we share that grace with others. We need both.

We need to draw near to the light and let it shine on us, and warm us, and change us. We need to rest in God's arms trusting in God's grace to

hold and save us. Here is where we find anew our identity as daughters and sons of God, unique, and immensely loved. It can be hard to take this in. Take time. Stop. Drink it in. That's worship and that's what our church worship seeks to be at its best. Live in the light that shines from him.

And from this everything else flows. We come together in worship, and then naturally we are sent out to live as the light of Christ. To serve the people of Kidlington and Hampton Poyle for their own sakes. We come to God, and we go out to love and serve the Lord as naturally as breathing in and breathing out. Our liturgical services are half the story; the other half that completes the story is our service in the community – as individuals and also as members together of a church.

(visual illustration: cutting an orange in half – both halves make the orange. Christians need both to worship and also to live out our faith in daily life.)

Where are we now as individuals and as a church

I could go from here to preach a challenging sermon that (I hope) would inspire us as a church to start new projects and get more involved in community ventures. But remember where we are and what we have been shown. (Sermon 1 – notice where we are and what God is already doing right where we are.)

A lot of us are bruised, battered, and weary individuals. And similarly, as a church, we don't have the resources and people that we did have two years ago – our church is a bit bruised too. So we don't need anyone telling us that we have to do more; that we must start new initiatives and grand projects. That may come later on – but not right now.

Right now we need simple human kindness. And we need ourselves to be filled and blessed and warmed by the light of Christ. Tired, old, Simeon saw the light of Christ in the baby's face, and it was enough. We too need to see this light. To take time from our routines, to stop and gaze on him wherever we find him – in nature, in a church building, in art or music, in silence, in the dawn, in the face of a child or an old person - for remember he is present with us and active among us all the time (sermon 1). Receiving the blessing is living in the light of Christ.

Living as the light of Christ can be simple too for us at the moment. Remember the reading from Corinthians about each being part of the body of Christ? (sermon 3). Wherever we are we each have an

important ministry to show out the light and Godly kindness that we have received. It doesn't matter where we are worshipping at the moment – at home or in church – wherever we are God is there too. Everyday ministry is more important than I can say, and yet is very very simple. It's all about relationships with people around us. It doesn't have to be heroic preaching in the high street – just think of the impact all these tiny lights make when they shine together. We might feel useless or insignificant, but God empowers us (transforms us even – sermon 2) and uses us just where we are. Small things combine to make something wonderful

The same is true in our church life. Just being practical for a moment, we need to recognise that right now in our church we are trying to do everything we did before, plus the extra things we started in Covid, but with fewer resources and people. This isn't kind to our volunteers, or church officers, or clergy, and in the end it will break us.

Remember the image of the way God's servant works from our first reading? God's servant works with such gentleness to achieve God's mission that even the bruised reed will not be bent to breaking point, and the tiniest smouldering wick of the weakest candle will not be snuffed out. Unfortunately, our church institutions do not always work like this. Sometimes we break our willing volunteers, and sometimes our clergy too. We need to notice what we are being shown around us, and then to be prepared to change.

For our church to live as the light of Christ right now, we may need to simplify ourselves as we look to the immediate future.

Priorities as we Look Forward

We look to a church that is **simpler** in its structures and maybe in its liturgy too; a church that is **humbler** – a servant church rather than an institutional church; but a church that is **even more bold** because it is filled up with the light of Christ and able to live **as** the light of Christ for all those around it.

We don't need to be super-energetic, fully healed, and supremely confident before we can live **in** the light of Christ and **as** the light of Christ. Quite the reverse actually. (Such people are often off-putting and frequently out of touch). A broken reed, a wounded healer, who has experienced for themselves the transforming love of God is often the very best messenger of Christ's good news. Remember how God

always positions himself at the edge of society (sermon 3) As a church community we may be scattered but we are still connected; we may feel under-resourced, but we are full of the greatest resource of all: the light of Christ. We have all we need.

As Team Rector, these are the priorities I am standing by:

- To fill ourselves up on the light of Christ
- To nurture our faith in worship and in small groups
- To let go of some of the demands on us
- To hold fast to our mission “to serve the people of Kidlington and Hampton Poyle for their own sake”, as part of Christ’s mission “to proclaim good news to the poor”
- To re-align our priorities and resources so as to be present for people outside our buildings as well as in them
- To preach and be good news with kindness, gentleness, and love to one another and beyond.

Where do I want our church to be in 10 years?

I want us to be a church where the worship fills us up with Christ, based on relationships and not buildings, with worship in a variety of styles, places, and times of worship.

I want us to be a transformational church more deeply rooted in the local community and playing our part in a fairer more equitable society.

I want us to be people with a faith deep enough to notice what God is doing around us, and flexible enough to change in response.

Conclusion

The future church looks different but Christ is always the same. Often as we follow him we are called to do something different: The wise men returned by another route.

Am I hopeful for the future? Yes I am. Covid may have left us with a smaller church community, but I think it will be a deeper one, more prayerful, more open and flexible to God’s guiding spirit. We are hopeful not because we know the future, but because we know very well who holds the future – Jesus Christ the light of the world.

Jesus Christ, light of the world. By your grace may we be warmed by your light and live as your light in the world, Amen.