

Sunday 27th November

Isaiah 2:1-5
(Romans 13:11-end)
Matthew 24:36-44

The newspaper I usually read has had – since the day Russia invaded Ukraine – a section which is headed “what we know on day *nnn* of the invasion”

Anyone like to take a guess as to which number we are up to today? 277

And I have to say that, to my shame, I usually skip over that section and move on to other news. Maybe you do a similar thing. Sometimes its that I don't want to hear the bad news; often it's that I don't think it directly concerns me. But I am sad to admit, I tend to move on without reading.

I can't imagine what it's like living in Ukraine at the moment with the constant threat of attack; with missiles landing in the street; with war and fighting all around. Maybe some of you have memories from WW2 and can recall such things. But for me I have no such memories.

But I guess that the words from Isaiah's prophecy that we read this morning must be particularly poignant in such situations. Words that look forward with hope to a time when things will be different.

*He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.*

Perhaps for us in this country its not the threat of missiles that directly concerns us, but the way so many things we have relied on over the years now seem much more fragile.

Our health service – I read this week that 1 in 4 '999' ambulance calls were not responded to in October. Our energy prices are rising seemingly uncontrollably – and there is the threat of blackouts this winter because there simply is not enough electricity to go round.

Food costs; widespread strikes; a refugee crisis, the huge issues concerning the climate emergency. Everywhere there is bad news. I admit sometimes its not just the Ukraine news I skip, its just about everything

We long for a time of peace and harmony.

We long for a time when things can be like in the vision of Isaiah.

We long for a time when all is well.

Part 2

In Messy Church last week we were thinking about Jesus - The Light of the World.

One of the things we made was this wonderful altar frontal which will stay here right through the Advent season till Christmas as we remember Jesus – the Light of the World – being born.

We also made lanterns, stars, prayer candles, etc. All things to do with light.

We thought about the different ways we use light (pick up on things that have been mentioned)

To help us see (torches, headlights, streetlights)

As a warning (lighthouses, on/off lights)

Bring joy and happiness (Fairy lights, mood lighting)

Instructions (traffic lights)

And we thought about light – just a tiny bit of light, even a flickering candle – being all we need to dispel darkness.

One of the ways Jesus describes himself is as The Light of the World. At our Christmas morning service we often read from the start of John's gospel where Jesus is described as the light and we hear - ***The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.***

But what does this actually mean?

Jesus helps us to see what is right. He helps us to tell the difference between good and bad. He helps us by making us able to see clearly when all around us is dark – making us see how God never forgets us and is always there to support us. He helps us realise we are never alone, no matter how bad things are; no matter how dark things seem.

In fact the darker things are the more brightly he will shine.

Today, as we have said, is Advent Sunday. And each Sunday in Advent we will light another candle on our Advent ring. Each week this year as we light the candles we will use some responses which help us see that Jesus is the Light of the World and that he shines in the darkness.

Part 3 – Walking in the light

Advent is a waiting time.

On one level we wait for Christmas – the coming of Jesus, born as a baby in Bethlehem and growing up to show us God and lead us back to God.

But on another level we look beyond to a time (as in the prophecy of Isaiah) when everything will be made perfect; when Jesus comes again to make all things well.

Thoughts of that end time, as described in the reading from Matthew's gospel today, may be ones that we are not very comfortable with. They hint at judgement, and judgement is something about which we might be fearful. But we could view things differently. Instead of thinking about ourselves being judged, we could look at judgement as a putting right of all things. That this 'judgement day', this moment when Jesus comes again, will be the day that the prophecy from Isaiah, and other similar prophecies, will be fulfilled.

But Isaiah is not just concerned about the day when all will be made right. He is concerned about the here and now; the way we live now until all that happens.

He finishes his words with an exhortation to the nation.

*O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the Lord!*

Isaiah is pleading with the nation not just sit back and wait for the vision to be fulfilled, but to walk in the light of the Lord now.

What does it mean for us to walk in the light of the Lord - and for us that means walking in the light of Jesus who is the Light of the World - in the dark and depressing world in which we find ourselves?

Walking to me indicates travelling, a journey, moving along. And walking in the Light means that on that journey we have Jesus with us. Walking alongside us, encouraging us, showing us where to go; warning us where there is temptation; making us smile and helping us to be joyful.

And as we walk with him, we talk with him and learn from him. He wants us to be lights in the world too. To grow in knowledge of him; to grow in wisdom; to become more like him.

And the best ways of doing this are to spend time in prayer, to talk to God and to listen to God, to allow him to be that special friend alongside us; to read the Bible; to meet with others and talk about our joys and our struggles. These things bring our faith alive and allow it to become an essential part of who we are and what we do each day. These things keep us close to him; keep that light shining in our darkneses.

Walking in the light of the Lord is not going to solve all the world's problems – we need to wait for the fulfilment of the vision for that. But it is making a statement by saying that wherever we go we take light with us – even if that light is a mere glimmer. Because even a small flickering candle flame means the darkness is no longer darkness.