

Wednesday 16 December 2020

*Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you (Isaiah 60.1)*

Dear Friends

The Christmas cards are written and posted, most of the presents are wrapped, the house is decorated, the shopping is done... Everything feels less last minute than usual and I'm sure that reflects the huge reduction in Christmas additions to the calendar – fewer carol services, school assemblies, social gatherings of one kind or another.

We are missing it all I know. Although those of us who can get out and about do have things to look forward to – the Advent Spiral, Nine Lessons, Midnight, Christmas morning service – even so, it's not the same, not least because we won't all be together.

I'm very conscious that we have lost people too this year, from our families and from our congregations. For more than a few, this is the first Christmas without someone really special; we know who they are and they will value our love and our prayers.

Despite all the challenges of this Christmas, the truth of the message of Christmas is unchanging and enduring.

What a gift this is to those who believe and know that Jesus truly is the Christ?

I struggle to think of Christmas having any value at all without a faith. The fripperies of Christmas mean little surely without the faith that gives Christmas its depth, breadth and light.

So, amongst all the darkness of this year, treasure the faith that gives you the true meaning and value of life. It truly is the greatest gift.

This is my last pastoral letter of the year. Whether they continue in January or not, time will tell. It depends in part as to whether I feel I have anything useful to say! I have enjoyed writing them and I know they have been appreciated by many.

As we head towards the new year there is more than enough medical, political and economic uncertainty in this country to feed endless commentators for years to come. I will avoid controversy by trying not to add to it!

One area of absolute clarity for me though, is the relevance of the Christian ethic in the post COVID, post Brexit world. Whether you hold very closely to the faith or not, we risk the future stability of our nation if we allow certain developments in public life to become a negative part of our national character. When we see deplorable events abroad, let us never be so complacent to think that similar couldn't happen here.

If you have a few moments over Christmas to think about this, consider what you hold to be the most important ethical principles that undergird our nation with its strong Christian origins and traits. I'd like to suggest the following, as ethics we should never assume cannot be eroded or destroyed in this country.

First, respect for human life and the human body. I connect those two because once respect for the human body is eroded, it's a short step to questioning the value of human life itself.

Second, honesty and truthfulness. These may not always play to short term personal advantage but they are the foundation for long term personal integrity. As I'm fond of saying, speaking the truth might be hard sometimes, but it's always easier to remember than a lie.

Third, care for others. Thankfully we've seen huge amounts of this in our communities this year; a wonderful antidote to cynicism and pessimism. Another favourite riposte of mine is the explanation as to why so many good people get hurt in life – the reason? There are simply so many more of us around! Love is everywhere, always. We just need to notice and affirm it a little sometimes.

The devil doesn't have all the best tunes, but neither do Christians have a monopoly on ethics either. Plenty of other world faiths are girded by similar ethical constructs as we are. The Holy Spirit works miracles every day through all sorts of people and traditions. We have no monopoly on goodness – but the inclusivity of our faith is one of our great and as yet unheralded gifts.

However you are spending Christmas this year, may God's peace and joy fill your heart.

David Ford, Rector
01527 873831

revdavidford@googlemail.com