



Sunday 14th August – Trinity 9

Led by the Rev'd David Newton

Hymn

- 1 Christ, whose glory fills the skies,
Christ, the true, the only light,
sun of righteousness, arise,
triumph o'er the shades of night;
day-spring from on high, be near;
day-star, in my heart appear.

- 2 Dark and cheerless is the morn
unaccompanied by thee:
joyless is the day's return,⁶
till thy mercy's beams I see,
till they inward light impart,
glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

- 3 Visit then this soul of mine;
pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
fill me, radiancy divine;
scatter all my unbelief;
more and more thyself display,
shining to the perfect day.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Opening Words

**Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Prayer of Confession

**Most merciful God,
we confess to you,
before the whole company of heaven and one another,
that we have sinned in thought, word and deed
and in what we have failed to do.
Forgive us our sins,
heal us by your Spirit
and raise us to new life in Christ. Amen.**

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent,
have mercy upon us,
pardon and deliver us from all our sins,
confirm and strengthen us in all goodness,
and keep us in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Psalm 80.9-end

- 9 You brought a vine out of Egypt;
you drove out the nations and planted it.
- 10 You made room around it,
and when it had taken root, it filled the land.
- 11 The hills were covered with its shadow
and the cedars of God by its boughs.
- 12 It stretched out its branches to the Sea
and its tendrils to the River.
- 13 Why then have you broken down its wall,
so that all who pass by pluck off its grapes?
- 14 The wild boar out of the wood tears it off,
and all the insects of the field devour it.
- 15 Turn again, O God of hosts,
look down from heaven and behold;
- 16 Cherish this vine which your right hand has planted,
and the branch that you made so strong for yourself.
- 17 Let those who burnt it with fire, who cut it down,
perish at the rebuke of your countenance.
- 18 Let your hand be upon the man at your right hand,
the son of man you made so strong for yourself.
- 19 And so will we not go back from you;
give us life, and we shall call upon your name.
- 20 Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts;
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

Bible Reading: Jeremiah 23.23-29

Am I a God near by, says the LORD, and not a God far off? Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? says the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the LORD. I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, 'I have

dreamed, I have dreamed!’ How long? Will the hearts of the prophets ever turn back—those who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart? They plan to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, just as their ancestors forgot my name for Baal. Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let the one who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? says the LORD. Is not my word like fire, says the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?

Gospel Reading: Luke 12.49-56

‘I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on, five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided:

father against son

and son against father,

mother against daughter

and daughter against mother,

mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law

and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.’

He also said to the crowds, ‘When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, “It is going to rain”; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, “There will be scorching heat”; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?’

Reflection

Written by the Rev'd David Newton

Is God's Voice more like an ethereal dream or a raging fire and a thundering hammer?

That – it seems – is the question posed by our readings this morning. And the answer comes back to us pretty emphatically. 'Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let the one who has my word speak my word faithfully'.

There is a recurring trope in the prophetic books of the Old Testament in which false prophets are compared to true ones. The usual pattern is simple enough: true prophets tend to prophesy disaster, false prophets tend to prophesy peace and prosperity.

Occasionally those true prophets speak words of comfort... We might think of the beautiful words of Isaiah 40, 'Comfort, O Comfort my people, you have paid double for all your sins'. Or, we might think of Jeremiah 29, 'I have plans, says the Lord, plans to prosper and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future'.

Yet most of the time, the true prophets are distinguished as *true* precisely by saying things the people do not want to hear. Jeremiah was thrown down a cistern. Elijah was called a terrorist by the King. All because they said things the people did not want to hear.

One cannot help but wonder who the true prophets are in our age, and if we are prepared to listen to them. Do we just seek to hear what we want to hear, or are we open to hearing of things as they really are? After all, a prophet's job is not so much to predict the future as it is to reveal how things *really are*.

Jesus – carrying on the same prophetic tradition that he read of in the Old Testament – also refuses to tell us what we want to hear. I would much rather hear of peace and prosperity, but instead Jesus gives quite frightening prophecies about the destruction of the Temple, and (in today's passage) tells us that he has come to bring division and not peace.

On the one hand then we have the allure of the dreamland; the false prophets who tell us that tomorrow will be better. On the other hand, we have the real prophets – including Christ – who tell us how it really is.

Dream world or reality.

To follow Jesus means to resolutely choose to live in the real world. Dreamland is of course far more attractive. Dreamland is the place of ethereal visions and vacuous rhetoric. Everyone wants to 'build back better' but quite what that might mean remains opaque. We all want peace in Ukraine, but how to get it is a source of genuine disagreement. John Lennon's famous song *Imagine* is so attractive because it plays on our deep desire for dreamland...

Imagine there's no countries

It isn't hard to do

Nothing to kill or die for

And no religion, too

Imagine all the people

Livin' life in peace

You

You may say I'm a dreamer

But I'm not the only one

I hope someday you'll join us

And the world will be as one

Well yes. Lovely. But how does that help us right now? Such an imagining provides no wisdom for us right now in the midst of war, a climate emergency, and a severe economic downturn. And that is the problem of the dreamer-come-prophets of the Old Testament too. They can dream away, but that didn't help much when the people faced genuine threats from foreign Kings, or oppression under vast Empires. So, Jesus does not present us with a dream. He comes to us with reality. It is the reality of a divided world, and indeed a divided church – as the recent Lambeth Conference showed us once again. It is the reality of a world of war, inequality and great suffering.

As Christians, the high value we put on 'hope' can be a façade for our attempts to live in dreamland. Jesus has promised comfort, ease, prosperity, right?! Jesus has promised that things can only get better right?

Perhaps not. Jesus' road leads to the cross. He ends his life as a tortured body on a tree. And part of Christian devotion has always been to stare at that crucifix – not the empty cross – but the cross

with Jesus' limp body hanging on it, crowned with thorns.

Christianity is not supposed to take us away from reality and towards dreamland. Instead, as we look at Christ hung on a cross we see the most brutal aspects of human reality.

Of course, and this is where genuine hope is, we also see something else. We see an empty cross, and an empty grave, we see Jesus eating fish on the beach with his friends, and we see the disciples meeting in an upper room as the Holy Spirit descends with fire.

But, but, but, none of that undoes the torture of the cross; none of it makes it less significant. What there resurrection and Pentecost scenes show us is that the tortured body on the cross is not the end. And that makes all the difference in the world.

We cannot in our world right now prophesy peace and prosperity; we cannot for certain say things are going to get better. We cannot - like those neo-classical economists want to believe - just 'grow' our way out of inequality and poverty.

Instead, we are called to be real, to be honest about the mess we are in and the divisions in front of us. We have to face the real world. We have to make complex and difficult decisions, about which there will be much disagreement and division. For life is not lived in dreamland; it is lived in the mess of this material world.

Ironically, it is only when we stop being a dreamer; it is only when we start seeking wisdom for the genuine and perplexing issues of our day, that we can then dream with John Lennon and say that, 'if it's not alright, then it's not the end'.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Written by John Crang

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has

come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

In many churches today we find candle-stands for people to light a candle as an act of prayer. So now (in our mind's eye) we light candles for the world, for others and for ourselves, remembering the promise of Jesus, I am the light of the world.' 'The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has never put it out.'

To the words 'Lord, be light in the darkness', please respond **'steady and strong, clear and true.'**

Lord, we light a candle for peace in a world of broken promises. Let your light shine in...., where we heard again this week words of violence and the drums of war. Be a beacon of hope to those who despair and a warming fire or cooling breeze to those who are weary. Lord, be light in the darkness, **steady and strong, clear and true.**

We light a candle of hope for families and friends who are special to us, We think of a particular person, or couple, or relationship where we want your light to shine with hope, or healing, of forgiveness, or celebration .. in your light; please put them together. (pause). These are your people; this is your light; please bring them together Lord, be light in the darkness, **steady and strong, clear and true.**

We light a candle for guidance for people who have lost their way. Many have been left behind in the race to acquire and accumulate, to be fashionable or famous. Many have found life too complex and are gradually giving up. Some people we know are struggling at this moment and we hold them before you now.. (pause). Be their pole star, their pillar of fire, their one true light - and hold them to a true course and a worthy goal.

Lord, be light in the darkness, **steady and strong, clear and true**

We light a candle for ourselves as we face particular issues this week. Perhaps only we know the questions we face and the high wire we must walk. Decisions that can't be put off much longer,

pressures that are becoming overwhelming, people we simply must pick up and love. Be our light in the midst of these problems, steady and strong, clear and true - as we worry and waver before you. In silence now, we name our own particular pressures ... (pause).

Lord, be light in the darkness, **steady and strong, clear and true.**

O God, we light candles for peace, for hope, for guidance; candles for joy and thanksgiving and giving birth. We light candles for dreaming and candles for dying. Light again in our hearts, we pray, the candle of your love, as a light we can cherish and share until we are overtaken by eternity.

Merciful Father accept these prayers for the sake of you Son Jesus Christ
Amen

Prayers taken from Second Intercessions Handbook, John Pritchard, 2004

As our saviour taught us so we pray

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.**

The Collect

Almighty God,
who sent your Holy Spirit
to be the life and light of your Church:
open our hearts to the riches of your grace,

that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit
in love and joy and peace;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Hymn

- 1 Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.
- 2 Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee Lord;
be thou my great Father, and I thy true son;
be thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.
- 3 Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.
- 4 Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise:
be thou mine inheritance now and always;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart;
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.
- 5 High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won;
great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Blessing

May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. And the blessing of God...

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen.