

**Address:** *'Jesus bids us shine'*

Our Christmas plans have been turned upside down. This is not what we expected. Sitting masked in church- denied access to our families for Christmas - trying to make sense of a constantly changing situation and not a little anxious about the spread of new Covid.

I'm told that it's a sign of old age, that childhood memories suddenly become more vivid - more compelling. I awoke the other morning, with a clear memory of singing the hymn as a child: '

*'Jesus us bids us shine - with a clear, pure light -  
Like a little candle burning in the night'*.

It's not in CH4, but I gather it was in CH3 and probably was discarded as being 'too sentimental' or bad theology. I found it in my Sunday school hymn book though, of 1953 - and back flooded the memories. And a very strong sense, that it was not bad theology at all but *exactly* what we are bidden to do.... Being Christ in the world - rather like candles.

This Advent those of us in the study group have been immersed in Tom Wright's '*God and the Pandemic*' and alongside that - for some of us, there have been the daily meditations from Richard Rohr - so Wright and Rohr (sounding alarmingly like Right & Wrong) have been swirling about in my mind throughout Advent.... And alongside them.... That strong, strong impulse: *Jesus bids us shine...*

The Rohr meditations this Advent have been exploring the idea of '*Giving Birth to Christ*' - of Christ being incarnated in the world, God's great gift to humanity. Nothing unusual in that, you might say - that's what we understand by the Incarnation. God came into the world in the form of a vulnerable little baby.

But usually, we assign the role of 'giving birth to Christ' to Mary. It feels safe; it's a wonderful story and she does it - for us - on our behalf.

But just as our Christmas is being turned upside down. Maybe Advent has been too - as we take a new perspective on this idea of 'giving birth to Christ' - *because the invitation from God is to us too.*

***WE are being invited to give birth to Christ in the world...*** we are invited to play our part in the Creation story, in the ongoing incarnation of Christ in the world. And yes, it involves pain and patience - powerlessness and humility... and great trust. Just as any childbirth does.

We are not just passive bystanders at the crib side in the nativity story, lost in wonder, love and awe - we are active PARTICIPANTS in the Christmas story - like

Mary, we are called by God, invited by God to take part in the greatest 'dance' as Thomas Merton called it. We are invited to join with Christ - yes, Jesus, the Christ - as he reveals love's urge towards wholeness:

***Through reconciliation, mercy, peace, and forgiveness.***

In Jesus, God breaks through and points us in a new direction. He bids us to '*shine like the light of a candle*' - not caught up in our own little ego struggles, totally preoccupied with our 'false self' and our petty obsessions.

And this is where the Church, perhaps, has done us a disservice - with its traditional emphasis on personal salvation. And I quote Richard Rohr here:

*"The common Christian understanding that Jesus came to save us by a cosmic evacuation plan is really very individualistic, petty, and even egocentric. It demands no solidarity with anything except oneself. We whittled the great Good News down into what Jesus could do for us personally and privately, **rather than celebrating God's invitation to participate in God's universal creative work.** Instead of believing that Jesus came to fulfil us separately, how about trusting that we are here to fulfil Christ - in the world?"*

Perhaps this is what's meant by: '*Jesus bids us shine...*'. Less of ego, more of *Christ in us* and recognising Christ in one another. Like candle flames together - in this great Cosmic dance of God's creation.

I believe it also helps put the pandemic in some kind of perspective too.... Not to feel overwhelmed by it - but to shine like beacons of hope as we care for neighbours, comfort the bereaved, pray alongside those who are suffering - be Christ in the world, as Jesus bids us - and God invites us. And what a glorious revelation that is, this Christmas.

Amen.