

Revd. Simon Lewis

*Isolation Radio Talk*

Sunday 24 January  
Theme: Epiphany 03

## **Grace dawned on the world**

Good Morning

If I do touch the despair you have, the lurking cynicism, the hostility to a world that seems easily to reject what you hold special and essential, then I shall be leading you astray; I do not wish to do that. You who are Christians are a people of kingdom values; you are those whose hearts are warmed by the good news of the Gospel. If you do seek in your own lives to evidence the fruits of the spirit, I can do no better than build in you the hope that faith brings.

In the Christian Scripture there is a short letter said to be from Paul to someone called Titus. I won't go into any arguments about who wrote it and when it was written but will draw your attention to one sentence within it; it is this: 'The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all' (Titus 2.11). Or to put it another way, 'The grace of God has dawned on the world with healing for all humankind'.

I cannot think of a more beautiful phrase to lift your hearts this day. It is not in the past tense; it is in the present and in the future; in this Season of Epiphany we try to understand how Jesus became known in his own day; and now, in ours.

The 'grace of God has dawned'; it is something that has a future. War does not dawn, it breaks out. The Plague did not dawn, neither did AIDS; neither did COVID-19; famine does not dawn; it comes upon people. Peace *does* dawn, civilisation dawns, understanding dawns. Things that dawn carry with them hope and expectation, for the dawn even or perhaps especially in winter is the herald of light. In contrast with the equator, for all of us living this far north, dawn is no sudden thing; it is most often quiet, unobtrusive, imperceptible.

'The night is often darkest before the dawn' [Thomas Fuller, theologian and historian] captures a truism for those who have watched long hours beside the bed of the sick or dying. Wonderfully it is nothing new; read for yourself Psalm 46, it starts, 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble' (v1); God is within the city; 'God shall help it when the morning dawns.'

You know these past months how darkness has inhabited the earth; awake in the dark, the hours seem so long; familiar landmarks you *know* are there do not give the security you ask of them; when they resume their shape and the familiar is familiar again, can you sigh with relief; know that the dawn has come, the day has already begun.

Take that sense with you as together we start the long journey into the future but take also the first words in the letter that precede the dawn. 'The grace of God has dawned'. Nowhere is that phrase 'the grace of God' to be found in the Hebrew Scripture; it is said so many times in Christian Scripture that you can know the idea and the reality was very important. The Grace of God, is not really about God's goodness; through the centuries before Jesus the writers of the Hebrew Scripture knew all

about the goodness of God. In Christian Scripture writers introduce you to the *grace* of God. What is it then?

One talk, sermon (call it what you will) in January 2021 will never suffice. I simply say *grace* is that gift from God with which we respond with gratitude and gladness. In the awfulness so many have faced these past 12 months and remembering the agonies of those who could neither touch nor visit those they loved, I tell you now of a person whose husband died in a hospice. He did not want to go into the hospice; he wanted to die at home; his wife did not want him to go; neither knew what a hospice was like. In the end he *had* to go. When he died, his widow spoke of how overwhelmed she had been with the understanding and the care both had received, and how the staff had seen everything, she said, from 'our point of view'. She did not put it into such words, but I will tell you that she experienced what in my language is *grace*. For me, to say to that person the word 'grace', would be out of place; but that is what it was.

In years gone by when theology was a matter of intellectual debate and when it was almost a mysterious substance God 'gave' to certain people, *grace* became drained of its meaning. Christians of the early Church used it often and gladly. But, if you look for them to explain the *grace* of God, they are silent; they had no need to explain it and, neither do you. They knew the *grace* of God; they had felt it; they had seen it for themselves in Jesus Christ, they had heard it when prior to his own death he had told them, if you are to live and give *grace*, you need first to recognise your own need of it and receive it. This is what happened to John Newton, who wrote the song *Amazing Grace*; he dragged from the depths of a complex and conflicted self the words of this song; he knew that when all is stripped away, we are left with a human fragility that knows its need of unmerited generosity and mercy.

If you will, look with the eyes of faith, so you shall know it, you shall see it too. John in his most thoughtful and beautiful letter (1 John 1), rich in meditation, tells you that "what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, ... [we] declare to [Jesus] the eternal life." In the opening words of the Gospel of John, he tells you that God in Jesus Christ dwelt among us 'full of *grace* and truth' (John 1.14).

So now, walk with confidence through this year 2021. Without doubt there will be dangers and difficulties; there will be sorrows; there will be, by the *grace* of God, many joys. A new day dawns; the *grace* of God dawns; it dawns for all the world; it dawns for the healing of hurts, of memories; His *grace* dawns for all humankind.

Thank you for listening

## **Prayer**

Let us pray to the one God, Creator, Word and Spirit,  
that our lives may bear witness to our hope.

Bless to us, O God,  
the road that is before us.  
Bless to us, O God,  
the friends who are around us.  
Bless to us, O God,  
your love which is within us.  
Bless to us, O God,  
the light that leads us home.  
Amen.