

**7<sup>th</sup> February 2021. Sermon on the reading John 1:1-14.**

**Colossians 1:15-20**

**Online Service for Oakworth Parish Churches: Christ Church Oakworth and St. John's Newsholme. By Sharon Quinn**

*Lord Jesus, open our hearts and minds to see you dwelling closely with us.*

### **Social headline**

Do you feel in our society, our country, our world, with the help of media now, that we are even more encouraged to pick a headline grabbing side, and then put as much energy as we can to stay there in that camp? To feel encouraged to even apportion blame when others are questioning or challenging that chosen camp's beliefs, decisions, mistakes, or behaviours?

It has always been more challenging and uncomfortable to have an attitude to fully engage with, listen to, respect the 'other' side of those who just don't appear to fit or belong into our chosen group? To be in an attitude to learn, at risk of having to change our minds and hearts. Or to be brought out of our comfort zones of what headlines we deem to be right, along with all we have pinned underneath that, with confidence, to prove we are still in the 'right' camp?

### **Belonging**

It is not difficult to see how easily we could fall into this habit as we know as humans we have always had that desperate need to feel comfortable in a supportive, like minded group where we feel we really belong.

We have always been wary of others who could, if we were encouraged to listen to them, make us feel like they are dragging off our comfy slippers and make us not only have to empathise

with them when we have deemed them as being just plain wrong, but worse still challenge us that we might have to change our minds or hearts.

We all know that no matter what group we have achieved any level of belonging to, in family, church family, friends, social groups, we will never 100% percent remain unchallenged or be always agreed with, or even be safe from separation from.

John's headline is saying, with boldness, with no doubts, no whataboutery about the past, as prologue to his good news that 'From creation to now, God in Jesus is with *us all*'.

### **Showing**

When we read or hear about God, no matter how often we have done, we all have different imagery or feelings.

Anyone who has ever attended a homegroup, or often challenging Lent groups, or read other Christian's experiences, ancient or modern, in books or media, will understand why that happens, as he dwells with us alongside no matter what personal, social, or political things are happening around us.

If we have spent time getting to know God in Jesus, choosing to go beyond headlines, then we recognise that our world is still as full of darkness, and in need of light, when left to human order or reason today, as it was during the Old Testament knowing of God's involvement with us, during covenant, law, judges, kings, prophets.

### **John's headline news**

God came prepared to struggle in our darkness in a New Testament. Verse 5 says 'the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it'.

John's headline is that the one involved in creation from the beginning, from Genesis onwards where God said, 'let there be light, and there was light' and upon seeing that the light was good he 'separated the light from the darkness', was to dwell among us, as human flesh, a man. That was bound to create much division and debate.

The fact that it continues to do so, I think is testament and confirmation that there is more to God than the headlines, ancient or modern, 'believe' or 'non believe'. Beyond being kept quietly, conveniently far away enough from others who don't feel they belong to the group who recognise God. It has created so much joy through art, music, books, and through transforming lives.

Verse 4 John tells us 'in him was life, and that life was the light of *all* mankind'.

Verse 9 to 10 says 'The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him'.

Verse 11 tells us 'he came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him'.

Jesus clearly reveals God to us. There was no divide or disagreements between him and God, absolute belonging.

Moses heard God but could not see him. He was called by God to read, know, show, share the words on the stone but without guarantee that people would recognise God's word and especially no guarantee that people would live by them.

'Those' includes those who were responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of the community, the Pharisees, scribes, and priests. Those who you would think would recognise Jesus and easily welcome him with open arms.

Verse 12 says 'yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God'. We are all given the chance through Jesus as God's grace and truth to know an unknowable God.

If we believe that God is still that far off, unreachable, wrathful God who punishes us for sins via experiences of crime, loss, famine, war, pain, guilt, or even not receiving all we want in prayer in our way - then John's good news headline that God has sent himself to finally get us to notice, to relate, to listen, to experience God's grace and truth, to be his children, makes even more sense!

### **Sharing of Lent**

It is no co-incidence that God can particularly challenge us during Lent, which will begin in a few weeks. He speaks to us through sermons, hymns, prayers, confessions, blessings, in every aspect of our lives anyway.

Yet many of us during Lent can recall having our comfortable slippers dragged off us, our headlines or stereotypical imagery and all we have pinned underneath them for ourselves especially about 'others', is often challenged.

Jesus taught in parables, encouraging us to enter fully into a scenario, an imagery in our minds that is often what we really would rather not hear or learn.

To dwell in Greek means to 'tent' or 'encamp' just as God was accessed this way, by people in the holy tabernacles or movable tent. We have certainly realised, with many churches closed or reduced capacity, and having learnt new ways of service online, about the movable holy dwelling place.

Lent can be a real eye opener to us as to whether we have noticed that Jesus' tent isn't conveniently pitched far off

unreachably til we remember we need him, but is ever present, closely dwelling among us.

The name of our churches Christ Church & St. John's Newsholme is our headline of who we are but right alongside that are the words 'knowing, showing and sharing God's love'. This is our mission statement!

Just as John the Baptist in verse 6 to 8 was sent by God to be a witness, a testifier of the light, so that through him all might believe, not himself being the light but to share God's love, light in the darkness, we too have been called as witnesses and sharers.

I have been called to lead our Tuesday homegroup during Lent. The theme that kept niggling at me to stick with and to tackle is 'love the stranger'. It is about migration. It looks at the different reasons for migration including what experiences of migration Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Joseph, and Ruth had. Then it covers New Testament and even Jesus as migrant.

In Session 1, the first question is:

What comes to mind when you hear the word 'migration'?

The headline and imagery that instantly sprang into my mind was a yellow dinghy packed full of people! Because that is what I have seen most often to connect with it. Underpinned by the headlines that they are not to be trusted, welcomed, or empathised with, or in need, they are not to belong in our camp.

This made me uncomfortable as a Christian. Why didn't I automatically see the faces of the two asylum seekers who I had stood right alongside with, with my hand on their shoulders, praying, leading a whole congregation, to be with God in Jesus, asking him to be with them for their next stage of their very difficult process.

Their story was nothing short of a nightmare. Yet they had found welcome, listening, belonging in one of God's holy dwelling places. They had found witnesses, shiners of light in their darkness.

It is a complex area of our broken world, that can't be tackled with an easy to ignore headline, but as Christians we will do our best to go beyond that, meet with Jesus, to guide us through it.

Jesus offers us all, as children of God, hope and comfort, dwelling alongside us in our pandemic, our fears, our uncertainties for our safety, also in our joys.

What headline news will he lead you to this Lent?

To fully see his glory, coming from God as Father, full of grace and truth, he will also challenge us, and all that we are to pin underneath our headline 'knowing, showing, sharing God's love'.

Amen.