

29th October 2020

Dear Friends,

First as always, how are you, as the reality of living with tier 3 restrictions due to the pandemic begins to be a stark reality, and as the nights draw in I realise that some of you may be finding these dark days difficult. I will be honest I do, like me, some of you live alone, and I must admit that I find that trying at times. As I write this it is dark, and it is only just past 6pm, the clock change has made a big difference! It is perhaps in these times that we must remember to support and encourage one another, and seek to draw near to God in worship and in prayer, and we do so in response to the love in which we are held even in the darkness, even in the difficulties we may face, in the frustrations and the loneliness. Having said that I also recognise that there may be a flip side to being alone, that many households find themselves crammed together when they would normally be busy in different ways. They too are held and loved by God, they too need grace and understanding, support and prayers.

I know that for many there was a “we can get through this” attitude at the beginning of the pandemic, but as the months roll on we become weary, and we begin perhaps to sit with the reality of loss and grief, we did not celebrate Easter, Pentecost or Harvest in the usual way, the next casualty would look to be Christmas.

So, what can we do? I wonder how many of you have continued to light a candle and place it in your window as the months have gone on? I know I stopped in the summer because it would not be visible, but now that the darker nights are here perhaps that is something you might like to revive, begin, or even continue. As we move through the festivals in the later part of the year, All Saints Day, All Souls Day, Remembrance, and Advent, on the journey towards Christmas perhaps we need to engage with the theme of hope that a simple candle flame can kindle. I love the words of Graham Kendrick's Carol:

*Like A Candle Flame
Flickering Small In Our Darkness
Uncreated Light
Shines Through Infant Eyes*

*God Is With Us, Alleluia
God Is With Us, Alleluia
Come To Save Us, Alleluia
Come To Save Us, Alleluia!*

*God Is With Us, Alleluia
God Is With Us, Alleluia
Come To Save Us, Alleluia
Come To Save Us, Alleluia!*

*Yet His Light Shall Shine
From Our Lives, Spirit Blazing
As We Touch The Flame
Of His Holy Fire*

*Stars And Angels Sing
Yet The Earth Sleeps In Shadows
Can This Tiny Spark
Set A World On Fire?*

*God Is With Us, Alleluia
God Is With Us, Alleluia
Come To Save Us, Alleluia
Come To Save Us, Alleluia!*

In normal times I would not begin to think in such a way at the end of October, and may well be caught muttering about Christmas trimmings in the shops, this year however I am challenged to look for hope wherever hope can be found, and if that includes stringing lights and lighting candles to celebrate throughout the dark nights of winter then I will celebrate that!

Maybe you would like to take an extended journey through Advent, Celtic Advent takes 40 days and begins on the 16th of November, there are a number of books and resources available to help you to do that, I am

using David Coles book *“Celtic Advent- 40 days of devotions to Christmas, “* and will be sharing my reflections on those reading each week, both in my letter and via YouTube. I will send the link to those who can access it, but even if you can’t, you might like to call, and talk to and pray with one another.

In these days we need to remember the hope that came to us and comes to us in Christ-Jesus, that hope was fragile, yet all powerful, and as his ministry went on we can remember stories of hope offered to the unlikely ones again and again. It was to an unlikely crowd that Jesus spoke the beatitudes at the beginning of what we know as The Sermon on the Mount. Take time to read them, this is The Message Version, which offers a fresh perspective:

5¹⁻² When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:

3 “You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

4 “You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

5 “You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought.

6 “You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat.

7 “You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for.

8 “You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

9 “You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.

10 “You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God’s kingdom.

11-12 “Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even! For though they don’t like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.

Jesus goes on to tell his followers that they are called to be light in this world! Light bringing out the God colours. So, in these dark days, I encourage you to seek hope and seek light wherever you can, To hold to the faith, to read the stories of Jesus, and to wait and pray. To share the words of another song: “Longing for light, we wait in darkness, longing for hope we turn to you....” So, let us turn to Christ, lifting our eyes above the difficulties and the darkness, not to deny them, but to get through them.

May you be blessed in this winter season, please don’t hesitate to call if you would like to talk.

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