

Sermon – Midnight Mass – 2020

'In the stillness of the night...'

Reference: John 1:1-14

Introduction: Do you find there's so much noise in our daily lives? Facebook messages, WhatsApp and Twitter notifications, advertisements in practically everything, notices, posters, partisan claims and statements... and all to what effect? Perhaps the noise prevents us from hearing and perceiving that still, small, life-giving voice.

I wonder, if like me you find that there's so much noise that it's difficult to hear any really significant messages?

How we need stillness and silence that we may hear and perceive what is good, lovely and true - the God-breathed life-giving word that restores our soul.

The Word at Christmas: I guess the fact that you're here or online with us at this late hour indicates that you desire something different from the usual noise of the Christmas preparation season. This is a moment to be still: to hear, to perceive with our spiritual eyes and to receive the gift that is offered to you this night. The gift comes unseen and yet is very real and becomes especially present as we open our hearts and lift them to God.

The ancient psalms reflect, 'Be still my soul - in silence my soul is waiting', and the Spirit of God speaks to us in enticing and gentle tones, 'Be still, and know....that I am God' (... 'here in your midst').

It was in the stillness of the night that an angel appeared to shepherds minding their flock under the stars on a rural Bethlehem hillside, announcing the birth of the promised Messiah, to be named Jesus, Saviour. And then, the stillness was exchanged by the glory, light and heavenly sound of exquisite worship of an angelic choir.

As the Word of God had been spoken, through the Angel Gabriel, to Mary nine months earlier resulting in divine life being planted in her womb, so now, that divine life appears in the humility and wonder of a human birth. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us; full of grace and truth.

But this Word is not like an email, or other written message from God. It's not just information or written word; it's not just more noise; it's creation.

When God speaks, life happens; things come into existence that hitherto have not been. This Word is the very means of creation of *all* created things, visible and invisible. This is the very source of life – life in all its forms, from the sub-atomic to the countless galaxies. All things have their origin in the Word and in Him, in Jesus, all things find their place in the created order. In Jesus, we discover who we are, who we were created to be; in him we find fullness of life, of purpose and our true identity. In Him we experience our soul being embraced by a love that is fathomless. This is the gift offered to all who will receive it. This is the gift offered afresh to you, to all humanity this night.

The Seed of the Word: When God spoke through the angel to Mary, she received that word in her heart, in her inner being. The seed was sown and became manifest in the form of a human embryo. The seed grew until it was fully formed and ready to take its place in human history. This divine, yet fully human being began a new age, a new era in human history; an era that will never pass away. The purpose of this fruitful seed, the Vine, continued after his death and continues today. You, me, this church and all other fruits of that Word of God becoming flesh continue to make an unfathomable difference in the world. Where that seed bares fruit, peace increases, love multiplies, healing appears and hope grows. Although, its growth has sadly slowed in the West in recent generations, in the world as a whole, especially in the Southern hemisphere, the number of those receiving this gift of life in Jesus, is growing faster than ever. Through him, life in all its fullness and freedom will continue to multiply until his justice and mercy is seen in all the earth; until he comes again in all his glory when every eye will see him and confess that he is the one through whom everyone has their being and in whom find their identity and fulfilment.

The Invitation: Will you receive this gift offered to you this holy night? Is your heart open and ready to receive the Word of God being spoken to your soul this night?

As our opening carol cited, 'Where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.'

And then new life comes in all its fullness as the seed is received, accompanied with heavenly joy and peace, the signs of a true Christmas.

May these be yours tonight. Amen.

The Revd Hugh Ellis, Vicar & Team Rector