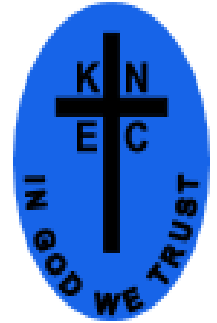




Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Scottish Charity No. SC006973

www.knec4jesus.org.uk



Reading Isaiah 40 : 1-4, 8-11
John 1 :6-8, 19-28

Sermon: 29 November 2009

Sermon

The text for the sermon verse 9: "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world."^{b 1}

I do not think I exaggerate when I say that we are all very surprised that Christmas is only 11 days away. It is as if time just moves so quickly. And to make matters even more challenging, we are reminded of Christmas every moment we enter the streets and the shops. It seems as if everyone is out to do just ONE thing and that is Christmas SHOPPING

We call this time ADVENT which means the arrival of something important! It depicts a sense of waiting...and yes a feeling of expectation. It reminds me vividly of the place I came from. I grew up in a very dry part of South Africa in the Western Transvaal where rain was a luxury unlike Scotland.

In the summer months everyone would look up to the skies with much expectation – eagerly awaiting the life giving drops from heaven. Everyone would be talking about just one thing: when is the rain coming?

And then signs would appear in nature itself telling us that the rain was near, like the wee ants that suddenly came alive and carried lots of food to their huge nests. They knew that if the summer rains come they would not be able to collect food for days. And then when the raindrops finally fell, everyone was in the streets celebrating.... I think this really depicts something of this waiting time before Christmas.

I cannot help to think then of the similarities between our lives and those of the ants preparing for the big event...

Are we ready to receive Christ in our lives and homes?

Are we prepared to sacrifice everything we have for our faith in him?

Are we capable to live up to his challenges of love and hope?

These questions must be our questions this advent while we prepare to celebrate the coming of Christ - the Light to our dark world. A world that is full of wars, abuse of vulnerable children, violent crimes, and all our lies...

^b Or *This was the true light that gives light to every man who comes into the world*

¹ *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984, S. Jn 1:9

In the first chapter of John's Gospel it is said that John is not the light but the one who had to tell everyone of the light that is coming. When John was asked if he was the Christ, the expected Messiah he emphatically denied this claim.

Mark's Gospel must actually be read as a background to this passage because he gets to the point by introducing Christ as the promised Messiah. Christ is indeed the Good news! And in order to do it authentically Mark uses the Old Testament to verify his point. John quotes from two passages in the Old Testament namely Isaiah and Malagai to bring his readers into the picture. In this passage it was prophesized that the Messiah will have a messenger that will prepare the way for him. It is striking that both these prophecies actually refer to Elijah who would appear as the Messenger. There are a lot of resemblances between John and Elijah. Both of them lived in the desert, and both wore clothes of animal skins, tied with a leather belt. We also know that many Jews in John's day believed that Elijah was not dead but alive since he was carried to heaven in a fiery chariot. It is no wonder that the representatives of the Jewish authorities asked him directly if he is Elijah. John replied that he is not Elijah.

Then they asked him if he is the Prophet? Many scholars assumes that the Prophet they are talking about is Moses because in Deu te ro no my 18:15 a prophet like Moses was predicted in the future to speak on behalf of God. In Mark, Matthew and Luke the Gospel writers used Elijah and Moses almost in the same breath when they reported the story of the transfiguration of Jesus. It seems then logical to assume that the representatives are actually referring to Moses. Again John says he is not the Prophet.

He is only the "voice" like Isaiah 40 predicted. The significance of the voice was not to be found in the speaker but in its message. He is fulfilling a task by clearing the road for Christ.

Then they asked him about his reasons for baptizing the "presumably" Jewish people. Again Mark's Gospel provides us with the background why this question was important to them. In those days when the Non - Jews repented and turned to God and His laws, they then - as a symbol of their repentance - had a One once-for-all ritual baptism designed to purify them of pagan impurity.

Most Jewish people thought that if they were born into a Jewish family and did not reject God's law, they would be saved; John told them instead that they had to come to God the same way that non-Jews did. The point of John's baptism is that everyone has to come to God on the same terms. Everyone that believes in Christ must turn away from their sinful ways.

John then says that Christ is standing among them whom they do not know. He is only the Messenger, preparing the way for Christ. John actually says he is nothing compared to Christ. He uses a strong metaphor from his time to stress this point. Disciples often served their teachers in the same ways that slaves would serve their masters, except for the most basic odd jobs like taking off their masters' sandals. John feels unworthy even to be the Messiah's slave!

What does this mean for us today?

The time is running out. We should be like the ants, doing everything in our power to be prepared in faith when we celebrate the birth, the life, death and reserrection of Jesus Christ. Ready to meet up to the challenges of believing in him in an ever increasing non-believing world. In Proverbs 6:6 we read that: "Go to the ant and learn a lesson from the way ants live."

How do ants live? In Africa they make huge nests out of mud almost like a pyramid. Although some ants are so small and cannot easily be seen, their nests stand out from afar. They know how to plan for the rainy or cold day. They gather and store their food so that they as a colony can have enough food for the winter months or when it rains. In Africa, the summer rains can last for weeks. They are good team of workers. Sometimes you will see how a piece of food is carried by more than one ant. They help each other out. When one ant experience difficulties, you will see how the rest will return and try to help. They know what sacrifice means. Some of them do not return to their nest. Some will be the prey of birds and humans. But although and despite the dangers they go out and do their best to gather food...

We as Christians can learn form the ways of the ants. Although we as Christians may be small in numbers, we should also stand out in the way we speak, act and think as believers. Sometimes we as Christians tend to prepare, celebrate and live the good news of Christ only during Christmas and Easter time. We must gather enough spiritual food for the whole year. It is one thing to have a beautiful tree, lots of food, presents and a merry atmosphere but quite another to live in a constant relationship with the Lord.

We must also become more and more like a team, helping each other to carry the burdens of this life. We must always be on the lookout for the Christian Brother or sister that:
Suffers financially because of the credit crunch or the loss of a job,
Suffers physically from sickness or old age,
Struggle spiritually because of a beloved that has died ... We must help each other where and whenever we can. We must carry the message in our actions that in faith we are never alone and without the constant care and love of God. We must make time to enter into a living relationship with God and share it with our brothers and sisters in everything we do. Not only this Christmas but very moment of each day.

Our faith in God through Jesus' birth and sacrifice on the cross made us travellers on a new way. A way that will lead us to a new kingdom of peace, love and happiness. A new life where there will be no more tears and suffering.

The ants also make sure their nest is safe and sheltered for the raining season. We must also make sure our houses of faith are ready and prepared to celebrate the birth, life and sacrifice of Christ.

- if our houses of faith are untidy we must start cleaning it again,
- if our walls of hope are crumbling under the onslaught of life, we must fix it by reading the Good News again,
- if our windows of love are filled with the dirt of our selfishness or pride, we must wipe it clean so that other can see the love of God,
- if our doors of reaching out to others are closed we must find the courage to open it again in order for others to feel the welcoming presence of our Lord...

May we gather enough spiritual food of faith, love and hope not only this Christmas but also for the new year to come.

Amen

Thought for the week

John 1:6-8 & 19-28

I do not think I exaggerate when say that we are aU very surprised that Christmas is only 4 weeks away. It is as if time just moves so quickly. And to make matters even more challenging, we are reminded of Christmas every moment we enter the streets and the shops. It seems as if everyone is out to do just ONE thing and that is Christmas SHOPPING. We call this time ADVENT which means the arrival of something important! It depicts a sense of waiting.and yes a feeling of expectation. John says to his readers that Christ is standing among them whom they do not know. He, John is only the Messenger, preparing the way for Christ. John actually says he is nothing compared to Christ. He uses a strong metaphor from his time to stress this point. Disciples often served their teachers in the same ways that slaves would serve their masters, except for the most basic odd jobs like taking off their masters' sandals. John feels unworthy even to be the Messiah's slave. And to think that this Saviour saved us too from sin, death and hell even though we are unworthy!

Prayer

Almighty God.

help me to know the true meaning of Christmas

And not to be caught up in the hustle and bustle of commercialism

Amen.