



ST JAMES AYR – SUNDAY REFLECTIONS – 3 January 2021



## Introduction

Dear all,

A very warm welcome our Sunday Reflections on this first Sunday in January and on the first Sunday in 2021, and first of all I wish you a very happy new year. I am hopeful that it will be better than 2020 and I hope that you share this hope.

Could I ask again, that you share these reflections with anyone who might be interested, either through the post or by leaving a print through the letterbox, if it is safe to do so. Thank you

### Intimations:

Please remember or video and audio services

We will start out North Ayr Prayer meetings again on zoom, the first will be on 11 Jan, hosted by Newton Wallacetown

Please join me now in our weekly prayer and reflection

The Bible says:

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. (Ps 119)

## **Prayer**

Loving God,

It is a new year, a new beginning, a time to reflect and a time to take stock, a blessed time when souls and minds become quiet and can turn from what has been and what has not been in the past year to what will be in the new year, it is a time of hope, a time of turning to you, walking with you.

Gracious God,

Today we give you thanks for the hope that springs from your word, from the promises the prophets made that you will bring light into darkness, from the experience of your people that you have walked with them through dark valleys and were the lamp at their feet.

Today we give you thanks for your son Jesus Christ who came to us to offer us hope and new beginnings, a new start with you, who through his preaching and teaching brought us closer to you, who through his death reconciled us to you.

Today we give you thanks for your holy spirit which gives us the hope and the strength that comes from you, through which we can walk with you through light and through darkness, through which you walk with us, guide us from darkness to light.

Gracious Lord,

We know it can be difficult to begin anew, to make a fresh start because that requires to question what we have done before, that requires to wonder if we should have spoken and acted differently. Grant us the strength to reflect on our past and to go into the future, we pray.

We know it can be difficult to hope when life is difficult and dark, when we feel tired of restrictions and limitations, when our life is dominated

by fear. Grant us the hope that light comes after darkness and that this light is you, we pray.

### Loving God

We know that we are not perfect, that we have turned from you again and again, but we also know that you have saved us by sending your son Jesus Christ and in this assurance, we bring before you what moves our heart. In Jesus name. AMEN

### Lord's Prayer

Our father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be Thy name,

Thy kingdom come

Thy will be done on earth,

As it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread

and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors

and lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil

for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. AMEN

## READINGS

### *Lesson Jeremiah 31, 10-14*

“Hear the word of the LORD, you nations proclaim it in distant coastlands: ‘He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.’<sup>11</sup> For the LORD will deliver Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they.<sup>12</sup> They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the LORD— the grain, the new wine and the olive oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be like a well-watered garden and they will sorrow no more.<sup>13</sup> Then young women will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. <sup>14</sup>I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and my people will be filled with my bounty,” declares the LORD.

### *Lesson 2: John 1,1-9;14*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome<sup>[a]</sup> it. <sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. <sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. <sup>9</sup> The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. <sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

## Reflection

### words

You will know this about me now, that I am an ardent Dr Who fan, that for me the time-travelling alien embodies all that is good about Britishness, the quirkiness and unimitable sense of humour, the creativity and imagination and a high moral compass. You will also know that for me David Tennant is the ultimate doctor, that as far as I am concerned the world can only be saved in pinstriped suits and trainers and that (as an inside joke for Dr who fans who might disagree) bowties are definitely not cool and neither are fishfingers and custard. And for me four companions make the tardis a bit too crowded.

So I would like to take you back to the glorious times of the tenth doctor, and to one scene in particular where the doctor is so appalled by the incumbent fictitious Prime Minister Harriet Jones' actions, who, out of fear destroys a spaceship after having negotiated peace with the alien race, that he vows to destroy her and to a scoffing Prime Minister he promises to do just that with only six words. Those six words are whispered to a bystanding journalist and make up the simple sentence: "Doesn't she look a bit tired?". The following rumours of the Prime Ministers health and fitness to govern will lead to her resignation shortly after. So the doctor knows, as the scriptwriter does, as we do, that words matter, not just in fiction and in TV series, but also in real life, words can build up and they can destroy, words can hurt and they can heal, and sometimes words can change the world.

### The Word

Our New Testament reading today knows that, too. It is still a classic Christmas reading, a reading often used on or before epiphany, the feast day of the three kings on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January, and it basically deals with two themes: with the word and with light. And both are very

much themes of Christmas, the light that shines in the darkness and the word of the prophets that we believe was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. And I strongly believe that this is what John means when he writes: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.<sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning.<sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made”; this is what John means, when he writes: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory”.

Through his word God changed everything, created all we see and know out of nothing (I know, I know: there is the theory of the Big Bang, there is evolution and the dinosaurs, and I will not deny any of it, but this does not change or contradict my belief, that what we see is God’s creation, brought into existence through the word that was with God). And from the very first moment of creation, millions of years ago, God’s word counts, God’s word changes. It is both as subtle and as powerful as evolutionary changes to a species over thousands of years, it is as inconspicuous and as meaningful as a single atom, that can make the vast difference between one chemical element and another.

God’s word is not a loud bang, it is subtle and soft. It does not come through warriors and battles, but through the encouragement and the warnings of his prophets, it does not come through princes and palaces but through a baby in a manger, it is not generally heard in a thunderstorm coming out of the clouds but rather as a whisper in our hearts, and it is the more powerful for it: because it changes us, and through us, his people God’s word changes the world. It has always done so: through his prophets God has turned a dejected, defeated, exiled people into a confident nation, through John the Baptist he turned a proud people into a repentant one and through us who have seen the word become flesh, become one of us he can change the world into one of justice and peace. Not immediately, not with a big bang, but silently and softly through each one of us in our small corner of the world.

Of course it requires us to listen, of course it requires us to take it seriously, the word that became flesh – Jesus, of course it requires us to act, to obey, but if we do, we have the power to change the face of this world, make it a gentler, friendlier place to live. This might seem like an utopia, like a dream, but it does not have to be. “When many small people in many small places take many small steps, we can change the world” is an African proverb that accompanied me through my Christian life and it proved to be true: many people like you and me brought down the unjust apartheid system in South Africa by not buying oranges from that country supported by churches who listened to God’s word, many people without any power whatsoever brought down the Berlin wall, in a movement that began with Monday prayers, that began with a word from the prophet Isaiah, many people in many places have brought fairtrade products into supermarkets, simply by asking for them, by buying them and many of those listened to God’s message of justice and peace. And so, yes, I believe that God’s word can change us, can change the world, after all, the world has already been changed through the word made flesh, through a small baby in a humble manger.

## Light

And this baby we believe is not only God’s word made flesh, but also the light of the world, the light that lights our darkness, the light of which John in our reading today says “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome<sup>[a]</sup> it”. And so the word of God made flesh is also the light of our life, illuminates our path, lets us see where we are going, at least for a little while. It is in John’s words: “The true light that gives light to everyone”. And so the light and the word belong together, are one and the same: They came into the world for our benefit, they have the potential to guide us, if we allow it, they give us strength and courage, the strength and courage that is necessary to change, to change ourselves and to change the world. The prophet Jeremiah in our Old Testament reading knew that, he knew that in order to change themselves and the world around

them, in order to survive the fate of captivity and destruction that awaited them, his people needed strength, and in order to muster that strength they needed hope, they needed a little light in their lives, a little comfort and a little joy, that is why he gives God's promise: "Then young women will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow".

Hard days lay ahead for the men and women of Israel when Jeremiah spoke to them and hard days lie ahead for us. Jeremiah knew that for his world, we know that for ours. It will be a harsh and dark winter for us, but beyond the winter there will be spring and there will be light. We will not always live in darkness. In fact we need not live in darkness now, because the light of the world, the light of hope has already come. And we can rely on that, we can trust in that, because it has always been thus, since the beginning of the world, since God came to us. We can rely on that, because God gave us his word. AMEN

### Prayer of Intercession

Loving God,

In this new year we thank you for the hope of a new beginning for the ability to count our blessings in difficulty and in adversity today, we thank you for the time to rest and to reflect and in gratitude for what we have we think of those who find it hard to hope.

We pray for all countries and regions that are still afflicted by war, violence and bloodshed, for the regions of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Tigray, for the people of Yemen and Afghanistan, where wounds are raw and grief is deep. Grant them peace .

Lord, have mercy

We pray for all, who still live through the coronavirus pandemic across the world in the USA, in Brazil, in Italy and Spain and in this country, where cases are rising and people live in fear again, where our neighbours live isolated and alone. Grant them strength.

Lord, have mercy

As a new year begins, a year of change, we pray for the leaders of the world and of our country, that they might seek peace and unity among nations, that they might look out for the poor and the disadvantaged as you have commanded them to do. Grant them wisdom

Lord have mercy

We continue to pray for our community and in our congregation here in North Ayr, for all who are bereaved and lonely, for all who are isolated and alone, for all who are ill and frail in hospitals, in care homes and at home. Grant them your love.

Lord, have mercy,

In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN

## Benediction

And the God of light guard you and guide you in this coming week. And the almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forevermore.  
AMEN