

2 Epiphany

19 Jan 2020: Rev Ken Wratten: St Luke's

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalms 40:1-12

1 Cor 1:1-9

John 1:29-42

Six years ago I was given the life changing invitation by Bp Mary to be on the team from this diocese who met with teams from Tanzania and Gloucester, England to get to know each other, and to discuss how we are different, and how we are the same. People from Gloucester and DWT told us how Christianity came to their country, and how Christianity is shaped and witnessed in their countries today. The speakers from TZ described how the hunger for faith in Jesus was so strong that they could not build new churches fast enough; some churches had more than 800 people worshipping every Sunday. The cathedral in Kasulu – where I gave a sermon - had 1500 people on Sundays.

The speakers from England described a very different experience. Membership has been slowly falling, and Sunday attendance and children's Sunday School attendance are significantly lower than they were ten years earlier. 40% of the population of England have never had any experience of church in their life. (Sound familiar?) Canon Robert Springett (now a Bishop) said that they need to become a missional church again, for the neighborhoods around them. People who do not know who Jesus is need to see the transforming power of Jesus by the ways we are DIFFERENT because of our life of faith.

One day John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him, and he said, "Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is the one I told you about. I didn't know he was the Messiah, but when I baptized him, I saw the Holy Spirit coming down from the heavens like a dove. It came down and landed right on his shoulder. I saw it with my own two eyes and I tell you, this is the Son of God." John shared his eye-witness experience of knowing Jesus was God the Son.

When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, he praised them for the great job they were doing, giving 'testimony of Jesus'. In other words, THEY – not just Paul - were called to carry the Light of Christ in them, and to pass it forward.

Jesus said in Matthew 5: 16, "16 (In the same way,) let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

The apostle John used two powerfully meaningful symbols to describe Jesus in the prologue of his Gospel. John said that Jesus was the Light of the world. This is the Light described by John, Paul, and by Jesus. And we are to let that light shine through us.

In today's Gospel reading, John called Jesus the Lamb of God. This symbol connects to the Old Testament sacrificial lamb, used as an offering for atonement; payment for anything the people had done that might displease God, that might be a barrier between them and God. These sacrifices of a lamb were made in the Jerusalem temple twice a day, every day.

The Temple is gone, and the need for sacrifice is gone, because Jesus gave himself as the ultimate sacrifice to make right anything we have done that separates us from God. In the beginning of John's Gospel, these two symbols come together to describe who this new teacher is; and how he is so much more than just a great teacher of ethics or theology. He is Light, and he is the Lamb.

So how do these ways of understanding Jesus, as Light and the Lamb, become transformational for us? How can they change us from the inside out.?

When you feel angry; when an obligation stops you from doing something you want to do: being a lamp reminds us when the disciples were angry with children bothering Jesus, but he called them to come to him. **Anger changed to peace**. Our anger can be changed to peace.

When you feel sad; A close friend dies. Being a lamp reminds us when Jesus' friend Lazarus died. Jesus knew he could raise Lazarus; but he wept with Mary and Martha. Then he gave new life. **Sadness turned to comfort**. Our sadness can turn to comfort.

When you doubt yourself; when somebody is depending on you to do something you have never done before, being a lamp reminds you of doubting Thomas who **found new faith**: our doubt can turn to new faith.

When you worry about things going on in your life; when you need a new job or a better job; being a lamp reminds you that Jesus said not to worry about tomorrow any more than the birds worry about tomorrow's food. **Worry becomes trust** that God will help you.

When you feel fear when it is your first day of work at a new job; being a lamp reminds you that Jesus sent out the disciples 2 by 2; and **fear turned to confidence**.

Look for the ways that Jesus DOES change your life.

Ask Jesus to help you through the things going on in your life.

Pray for the chance TO SHARE with people what Jesus has done for you, having to preach, but to share an eye-witness account.

This is not just about us sharing a belief with other people; it is about showing the world how belief changes the way we live our lives. When we Look for Jesus, and Ask Jesus, and Share Jesus, our faith really does change us from the inside out; other people see the Light; they come to know the Lamb for themselves.

Bp Saddock of Tanzania told us that he would like to send missionaries to the US, because he believed that we have plenty of need for missionaries right here. You and I are called to be lamps who carry the Light; we are siblings to the Lamb of God. Consider how you can make that light visible to everybody you meet.

AMEN.