

Light (Reverend Robert Boyle, Anglican)

Our theme for this celebration is 'Light at the River'. Light comes to us in many different ways, we have the natural light of the day, and in the evening all we have to do is press a switch and the darkness of the room is overcome by bright light. Our streets are made safe by being lit with the light created by electricity.

But long ago there wasn't electricity or gas – people lived by the sun – getting up when it was light and going to bed when it became dark. People had to create their own light, by lighting a fire, candles or oil lamps were used to create light.

Our focus so far has been on physical light, but often darkness and light can be used to portray how a person lives, how those who live in darkness have something to hide, they are afraid of the light, but those who live in the light are open in their thoughts and activities – nothing to hide.

As Christians we have a light that shines through the darkness, that shines in our lives, in our hearts, in our very being – and that light is Jesus, who came into the world, lived as one of us, but taught us to love, to bring peace, hope and joy to all.

Without love the world would be a very bleak and dark place to live, so we should not be surprised to find that love occupies the central place in the Gospels and other readings of scripture. Christ said that his followers would be recognised by the love they showed one another. He went even further, he said they would be judged on love.

We don't have to look very far in St. John's Gospel to see that the themes of his writings are light and love.

In our Gospel this morning we see that Nicodemus is in effect in the darkness of Christ's light, because he doesn't 'understand these things'

We have through the Easter Season been celebrating the resurrection of our Lord, the Paschal Candle has shone out as a symbol of the Light of Christ, shining not only into our lives and hearts, but also into the world, in which there are many dark places at this time.

In St. John's 1st Letter, we can see how, Walking in the light is the opposite of walking in darkness. It means seeing reality for what it is and being controlled by desires that accord with God's light.

If God is light, and in him is no darkness at all, then he is the bright pathway to the fulfillment of all our deepest longings. He is the deliverer from all dark dangers and obstacles to joy. He is the infinitely desirable One.

If in his own light he shines forth as a Being of infinite worth, then he is the star of glory that we were made to admire and cherish.

If God opens the eyes of our hearts to see all that, then our desires are captured by the surpassing glory of God over every thing that the world has to offer, and we walk in the light as he is in the light.

That walk is through sharing his love, for God IS love, and His love is unconditional, it is constant, and perfect. You can't influence God's love, because God IS love. Jesus didn't go to the cross because of any love we had for Him ... for any influence we placed on Him. St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 5:8 – "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Jesus must have really loved us, because it was our sins that put Him there.

We have never lived a day, a minute, a second, when God didn't love us.

· We may have hidden in shame from God, like Adam & Eve in the Garden of Eden ... but God still loves us.

· We may have deserted Him like the disciples, when they fled when Jesus was arrested ... but God still loves us.

· We may have denied Him like Peter, when they asked him about his relationship with Jesus ... but God still loves us.

· We may have doubted Him like Thomas ... but God still loves us.

Let God's love permeate our lives. Wake up in the morning and bask in the sun -light of His love. Go to bed at night and rest in the comfort of His light and love. Live in His light and love ... immerse ourselves in His light and love ... fill our lives with His light and love. Let His light and love over-power us and surround us. And more importantly let his light and love flow out to those around us – we sometimes sing a song that goes: Love is flowing like a river, flowing out through you and me.

THE RIVER (Revd. Dermot Thornbrerry, Methodist)

Before I became a Christian I was the manager of a Pest Control company in South Africa. I was a *Rattenfanger*. Now I heard that recently you have once again severe problems with rats which have been gnawing through a cable at a city fountain... The mayor has told me to report to the town hall !!!

RIVERS

Robert has shared some thoughts about "light". I would like to complete the theme of "Light and River" by sharing some thoughts about "rivers"

Rivers have a deep meaning in the bible. In a very dry Israel always short of water. The river represents the dream of God. The dream was of flowing river which brings life and abundance to the dry land. It was also about longing and hope for a new life and future in Israel.

Crossing of the Red Sea and the River Jordan became the turning point or a salvation event of a group of Hebrews as they entered the promised land of Israel. The river represented a crossing into a new life.

Standing on the edge of the river was a symbol of God's presence. There is a popular expression about a relationship with God is being like a tree standing beside a river. The person is being enriched by the river water which is God's word. I quote from Psalm 1:2-3:

But His delight is in the law of the Lord

And on His law He meditated day and night

He is like a tree planted by streams of water.

Which yields its fruit in season

And whose leaf does not wither.

Whatever He does prospers.

However the river is also about a struggle. We hear about the wrestle of Jacob with God all through the night before Jacob could cross the river and become the man called by God. Genesis 32: 22-31

There is a group called the Celts. The reason why I mentioned them is that they lived in Western Europe (including Germany from the 6th century BC.) When the Romans came they left for Ireland, Cornwall, Devon Scotland and Wales. As pagans they feared that there were demons in every geographical feature including rivers. Then in 600 AD in Ireland the Celts went through a Christian conversion through Saint Patrick who taught them to see God's presence and spirit in every geographical feature such as rivers.

They saw crossing a river or a bridge as sacred places. It was about overcoming fears and doubts. It was also about a refusal to be stopped by the problems of life. Crossing the river affirmed the grace of God and the continuation of the journey of a Christian pilgrim.

This understanding of the Celts had its influence in Christianity. Prayer places were established by river crossings.

I believe that Hamelin started as a prayer place at a crossing place of the River Weser. It was started by monks in the 8th century. Therefore Hamelin engaged in the adventure of life called by God. Maybe they were also (like the earlier people of the bible) touched by the understanding of God being present at the side of the river. They would also have known of many struggles like Jacob did with God.

Today in this celebration in Hamelin ..we are all standing beside the river enjoying and celebrating the grace of God which has been in this place for over 1200 years.

I am sure there have been many struggles in this community but many have been overcome. With God on our side who can be against us.

May the streams of God's river continue to enrich the people of Hamelin.

God bless you all.