

2<sup>nd</sup> January 2022

John 1; 1-18

### Meeting our shadows

It was a surprise to discover that this same reading was indicated for Christmas Day, and I turned to it for the service at Highworth, though with a few alterations, and it became a bit longer version for today. Then following the daily devotional from “Fresh from the Word” yesterday’s reading was Genesis 1 (which I will mention below) and today’s reading is the same one as our here. Light, darkness... a good journey into the new year.

The first few days after Christmas, and this Sunday the reading is from the Gospel of John, which is very different from Matthew and Luke, which in turn are very different from each other in the narrative of the birth of Jesus, and Mark which begins with an adult Jesus, no birth story there.

John doesn’t have the much-loved verses we know so well; this passage we have just heard is somewhat more philosophical in its way of expressing things, and even then, it does have some wonderful words, words we do recognise and love:

- In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God
- In him was life and that life was the light of us all
- The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it
- He came to his own, but his own did not receive him
- The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us

In these words we encounter the tension that continues till this day: presence and rejection, light and shadows, God with us. Today we have the clarity that without light, life is diminished, and God knows that too. The first command in Genesis is “Let there be light”, and that separated day and night, then there was sun, moon, stars, that have guided travellers for thousands of years.

Today we can measure cosmos in light years: 300,000 kms per second. The galaxy GN-z11 seems to be the farthest detectable galaxy from us, at 13.4 billion light-years, (that’s 134 followed by 30 zeros).

Another thing that is attributed to light is the visibility of shadows, and every material body emits shadows when faced with light. And there are at least, two understandings of shadows, the shadow behind us when we stand with light in front of us – and then there are the shadows we carry around with us such as envy, greed, prejudice, hate, and aggression - we have been taught to be polite, and we come across as rude, we have been taught in faith to always tell the truth and we have lied; or we have been taught to be honest, and we have not always done things honestly; or when we educated to love others, and we dislike all those who are different.

When we use our faith to disguise our prejudice, when as nations we admire power and destruction of the others, even when our faith presents us with a totally different picture: a child lying in a manger, soon to be exiled to Egypt, later to be crucified. We reject this as

weakness, not as Kingdom, when we proclaim the importance of protecting the Environment but so many of habits in the world simply deny this protection, or what happens to Refugees, those who sleep rough, and etc, etc...You get where I am going, don't you? Those are the shadows we carry with us. And we all have them be it as individuals or as nations, because as human beings we are vulnerable, fallible, imperfect. All this is made clear when we are in presence of Light.

Let me share a short joke that will help us understand this. Three clergy set up regular meetings so as to share experiences, difficulties, help correct mistakes – over time they grow to trust each other enough to share their deepest secrets (= shadows). One day they agree to tell their darkest to each other, so one says: each Sunday I take some of the collection money. The other two agree that is bad. The second then says he's been having an affair with a person in the next parish, and the other two say that is really, really bad. The third then confesses his darkest secret and says, I'm a terrible gossip and I can't wait to get out of here... it is a joke, but a joke that explains the way our shadows work...

So when in the Gospel of John we read that Jesus is the “true light that gives light to everyone”, we understand that Jesus comes because we are the humans we are, because we carry the load of our shadows, because being the Light Jesus makes our shadows move visible. We must meet our shadows and see them for what they are. We need to ask God to see them as part of our broken humanity and make us whole. Because of all this God is made human in Jesus so that we can give him our shadows. Jesus came, as we will read later in John, so that all may have fullness of life, even when some don't recognise him, or others reject him. Jesus knows us shadows and all, and loves us shadows and all, and came for life in fullness for all.

Having shadows is part of our life - the light of the world will make our life fulfilling, and our shadows even when they are an inevitable part of life, even if we don't like them, they will help us discover our true humanity and God will dwell among us in Christ, and we shall know the glory of the Son. We can't deny our shadows, they are there. But we can recognise them for what they are and ask God to come to our life-with-shadows.

Christmas is that encounter of light and shadow and full life in full humanity. God's gift to us in Christ. Let us praise God for this gift and share the call of our humanity in God's hands for all people, everywhere.

Amen.