

Midnight Sermon 2020

When I was at vicar factory, someone suggested that for the big occasions - birth, marriage, death, or especially Christmas and Easter, we write down lots of sermons, from different angles, that we could use over the years. Which makes sense - you can do the Joseph angle, or from the shepherds or kings, or focus on God's gift or our open hearts etc.

Of course, I'm the sort of person who thinks they know better than all those teachers, who've been vicars for years, so I try to come fresh to things each year, and see what's appropriate... but hey - this year - all those pre-written angles wouldn't work. Everything's different - so, what to write...

While I was scratching my head for this, I did come up with a great idea - what I've learnt about Christmas, from Christmas films - like supernatural events often happen near a 34th street, or if you've been naughty you might expect some ghosts to visit you on Christmas eve, or from home alone - always check you've got all your children with you before boarding a plane. But I figure it will work better as a congregation participation piece in a crowded church - so I'll save that for another year.

So this year, because Christmas has changed - its going to be very different. Some people thrive on change, for others it can be very challenging, and its especially hard at this time of year when we're full of expectation about what we normally do - the people we see or visit, or the way we celebrate the holiday.

So my sermon should give hope, and especially to celebrate the hope that is found in God, in Jesus. Yet there is also the need to pay attention to the loss.

We've just sung - within our darkest night
Can't even begin to tell you the statistics for how many dead, how many in hospital
The things we have lost.. jobs, businesses, holidays, exams, attending funerals of loved ones, weddings cancelled, it goes on and on.

But its Important to remember them
Grief - we need to lament what we've lost...
Grief journey - can't get to the new without it..
.. move onto the new, hope etc

So Christmas will be different, changed - but actually Christmas has always changed...
Some people spend it with one set of parents one year, and the other set the next year.
Unless you're still living in the house your grew up - you've had Christmases in different houses.

Anything to do with phones or the internet is less than 20 years old

The idea of time off at Christmas is fairly recent - we didn't really have holidays till after the second world war - you'd get one day off for Christmas, as we all know from Bob Scratchett and Scrooge.

And because it was the only day off, if you look at church registers, you can see that loads of people get married at Christmas - the vicar was busy doing 10 or 20 services - much shorter and less elaborate than now!

And as we know the Christmas tree was brought over by Albert in 1840, and Christmas cards started in 1843

And if you want to be really churchy about it - Christmas Day is the start of the feast, not the end. Before that you're waiting, and preparing, adn then it starts - Christmas, St Stephens, Holy Innocent, St John, Thomas a Beckett - huge liturgies and services, and feasting - all the way to Epiphany, the coming of the Magi - on Jan 6th.

And if you go back further, Advent started in 5th century

We like to think we're doing "what we've always done" because its reassuring - but actually - our lives keep changing, and we keep changing and adapting - and so we will adapt to these changes.

Adn that's why, I can't just write 10 sermons for Christmas and then put them on a loop - like ornaments we get out every year. Life is different every year.

Actually I often write quite negative, whiney sermons at Christmas.

I see shops full of stuff no-one needs, fridges full of food we'll never eat while some go hungry.
I see nations in conflict and little hope.
I look at the world and think - where is the love?
I can be quite an Eyore at times!!

But this year is topsy turvy isn't it?

This year has seen so much love and care - generosity, compassion - these are the high frequency words - care for neighbours and communities.

Respect and acknowledgement for the most needed in society - the NHS, teachers, delivery drivers, care workers.

Despite everything that science fiction and disaster films taught us - when humanity gets in real trouble - their goodness shines through! We pull together and act unselfishly.

That is surprising (to a cynic like me) and brilliant!!

Governments have given out money. They put the homeless in hotels for goodness sake,

And all that love and care is continuing over Christmas - I know our village is amazing, but it's happening all over - globally - humanity is showing how much care and love there is for each other.

And there has been internationally, a recognition of the beauty and fragility of our home planet - how much we need it, psychologically as well as physically, our earth.

And that's a good thing. Because some see this pandemic has really been a warm up for the biggest challenge to the human race - our environment, our climate.

We will not be able to self isolate from our catastrophic weather, and there won't be a quick fix vaccine.

We will have to work together across nations, and there will be a huge financial cost.

Actually - economists have said that compared to this pandemic, the actual financial cost of changing to carbon neutral is quite small!! The obstacles are political will.

And that will come from us - telling our politicians that we want change, and voting for the people and parties that deliver it.

Because the thing is, we mustn't despair or think that things will never change. We have been surprised by the compassion and generosity shown during the virus. Cynics like me - we were wrong. So we shouldn't give up on good winning. And we should be prepared to be optimistic, hopeful, about our climate and planet earth too - we mustn't give up on it.

Because God has never given up on us. After the flood, he promised never to destroy the earth again. He remains committed to the earth and to us.

And I'll show you how committed he is - he bought in, he moved out of his palatial throne and became one of us, he moved into the neighbourhood. God became human, and showed us that we were good, that we were worth loving with all that he had. That he hadn't give up on us.

Jesus is God, and God came among us. He declared that we were good.

- put Jesus in the manger

And that's why I love Christmas.

Because so often we worship Jesus because he's an incredible teacher of how to live life.

Or we love Jesus because he's a healer

Or even, because of his death on the cross for our sins

Or his resurrection and giving us eternal life.

But actually - the moment everything changed, was now.

In that stable, in the dark,

God sent his son, at the right time

And all heaven and earth marvelled at how the creator entered his creation in all its fragility and risk, all its mess and wrongness, he said - let me love you. And he still does today.