

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

The Thought for the Week

Sunday 13th December 2020

Bob MacCallum, who was quite a character, a member in my first congregation, with the appearance of one of the worthies from “Last of the Summer Wine”, told me once how when he was discharged from the Royal Navy at the end of World War II, he decided to enjoy an evening out and bought a ticket to see a show in London. It was the opening night of a brand new musical. He was not quite sure what the show was about, but he heard that it was from the USA. He really didn’t care what he was going to see. All Bob wanted to do was celebrate the fact that he had lived through the war and that he would soon be returning north to Scotland.

The first thing he noticed when he entered the theatre was the brilliant light in the foyer. For six years, he and members of his generation had to get used to the black out and muted lighting. Now, at least, in this warm and welcoming and crowded space, the world was suddenly bright again.

Another thing he noticed was how alive and excited everyone was.

And in surprise, he realised that their festive mood was affecting him and that he felt the same way.

Joy is infectious, we have all experienced that.

But nothing was to prepare him for what happened when the curtain went up. The stage blazed with light of a sunlit world stretching into infinite distances.

The dancers and actors positively leapt onto the stage.

The music was electrifying.

The words of the opening number transformed every listener – “O what a beautiful morning, o what a beautiful day; I’ve got a wonderful feeling, everything’s going my way.”

Well, we know what song that was, and the musical is, of course, “Oklahoma”. It burst into the dark world of war torn Europe like a sudden blaze of sunshine and hope and possibility and joy.

We are all needing such joy in these dark days.

In times of darkness it seems that God yearns to stir our hearts with a joyful song. We find those promises throughout the Scriptures.

All of us, I suppose, yearn to claim the promises of God sung in the Old Testament Scriptures by the prophet Zephaniah, “Do not fear. I will remove disaster from you. I am with you. I will bring you home. I will renew you in my love.”

Several years ago, in South Africa, during the dark days of apartheid, people would light candles and place them in their windows as signs of faith that one day, over time, justice would prevail, light would break through the oppressive darkness and they would experience a deep joy once more.

It was a very small, but subversively, potent act that stirred results.

The government banned the lighting of candles.

It became a crime, like carrying a weapon.

The children would laugh, saying, “Our government is afraid of candles.”

It was afraid and rightly so.

Those lit candles stirred the people of South Africa to share hard truth and painful reconciliation.

A seemingly small change over time ushered in life-altering transformation in our world.

So what can you and I do to bring those changes in the world today?

What must we do in our daily lives that would begin to turn the world right side up?

John the Baptist, the one who came to announce the arrival of the Messiah, states it quite plainly:

“Play nice; don’t fight; don’t horde things but share your belongings; don’t take advantage of other people; don’t use your power or strength in a way that hurts others.”

Simple lessons indeed that many of our parents taught us, eternal lessons that also point to Jesus’ special love and concern for those who are experiencing difficulties and problems and profound darkness - and I know that there are many in St Nicholas Church who quietly put those lessons into practice each day – donating generously to the South Ayrshire Foodbank; supporting the Presbytery of Ayr link with Bandawe Presbytery in Malawi; driving folk who are undergoing cancer treatment up to the Beatson Unit in Glasgow and bringing them back home safely; tending and caring for family and friends with disability; visiting elderly folk and spending time with them at their firesides. Ordinary people here, doing ordinary things in an extraordinary way, effecting change in the lives of others and bringing light to their darkness.

When we see the good work that God is doing in our world and in others, we cannot help but rejoice.

How do you and I find real joy?

I can remember Flora Smith, my Sunday School teacher in the Primary Sunday School, telling us that joy is to be found when we put Jesus first, Others next, and Yourself last! And it is quite true!

Never for a moment doubt the effectiveness of your Christian witness for Jesus as you hold out your own candle in the darkness, bringing joy into another’s life.

That candle will enable someone else to sing and rejoice and have hope for their tomorrows!

The Reverend Fraser R Aitken, Locum Minister