

Along the track

The Lantern Bearers

At a recent funeral these words from Rosemary Sutcliffe's poem, The Lantern Bearers were read:

*It may be that night will close over us in the end, but I believe that morning will come again.
Morning always grows out of darkness, though maybe not for the people who saw the sun go down.
We are the Lantern Bearers my friend: for us to keep something burning, to carry what light we can forward into the darkness and the wind*.*

These are troubled times. It would seem that we are on edge, concerned and uneasy about the present as well as the future. But if we are lantern bearers, what do we want our light to reveal, to bring out of the darkness? Jesus told his followers that they were to be 'the light of the world'. People don't light a lamp and put it under a bowl, He said, 'Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house'. Our faith calls us to community, to work for justice for everyone, no matter who they may be.

Surely these times ask something of each of us. We cannot sit back and wring our hands and tut, tut. But what do we want people to see, to hear, to experience.

At Easter time we reflect on the last words of Jesus on the cross. To the thief crucified with him who spoke words of comfort, Jesus said 'this day you will be with me in Paradise'. To the crowd who mocked and derided him, he prayed for that they might be forgiven. They just don't know what they are doing. To his mother, he entrusted his much loved disciple John and to John his much loved mother.

Is our lantern to be one of comfort to those who are suffering, being victimised? Is it to be a light that shines into dark corners and recesses where ignorance and prejudice lurk? Is our light to be one that shows the way to build understanding and relationships, a lantern which shows where we might grow in our care for each other, be they family, friend or stranger?

Sadly, in times such as these it is so easy to create divisions and exploit them. You challenge my way of thinking, my way of doing things, so you are different and not 'one of us', not to be trusted. People who can be regarded as inferior even, because of what they believe or how they live, rather than seeing them as people on a common journey seeking meaning and purpose.

In today's world where such extraordinary upheavals are occurring, we are called to be responsible for each other, to seek greater understanding of why others think and act in the way they do, not to sit in judgement or to feel superior, to get connected to others, to work with others so that we might work together to live in a world of our own choosing, rather than what others may impose. If we are Christians, surely that is the message that Jesus taught us (Matthew 25: 31-46).

The last words of Jesus challenge us to live this out daily, finding ways of healing and reconciliation, ways of building peaceful communities, to find connections.

Such a change comes at the grassroots with people living the gospel in simple, ordinary ways – looking for new ways and preserving old ways that help us to connect with each other and with God who loves us all.

What do we want our world to be, what do we want for our children and the generations which follow. We cannot simply leave that up to others. Nothing is more powerful, no message is more potent than seeing it in the flesh, seeing what a vision, a dream might look like. Jesus' ministry put flesh and bones on the vision of God for our world. People could see it, hear it, feel it.

Our conduct, the way we live our lives, the way we relate to each other, forgive each other, work to understand each other, care for one another, the way we think and talk about what is just and right, the way we use this world's goods, the way we are stewards of creation – all these make us witnesses to those around us, to our children, to the next generation. What do we want them to see? What will they see us committed to? Working for? What will they know of our dream, our vision? What will they know of Jesus and his vision?

It starts in a very simple way. Have you paid someone a compliment today and told a loved one how special he or she is to you? Have you given a word of encouragement, a positive observation, a word of thanks or offered an apology? In the last few days, have you said a word of welcome or made a gesture of friendship? Make morning come again.

* The Lantern Bearers by Rosemary Sutcliffe.

Regards
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