

May I speak in the name of the living god, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

So many people who come to services or events here at St Pater and St Paul's comment on the beauty of this church.

Like me, I suspect that each time you come into this beautiful space, you notice something different. It might be one of the banners, the amazing memorial carvings, or the gold angels decorating the organ. I would like to invite you to take just a few moments to look at the beautiful stained glass windows that we have here in church.

Stained glass windows are a familiar feature in many of ancient parish churches up and down our country. If you go into any of the great cathedrals, you see windows soaring into high arches or in circular rose windows.

I love stained glass windows, not just because of the beautiful colours – blues, greens, reds and yellows, or the intricate artwork, but, because of the stories they tell.

Introduced during the middle ages, when so many in the community were unable to read and write, the great Bible stories were brought to life pictorially in the stained glass windows to inform and encourage people in the faith.

Even on a day like today, there is plenty of light shining through the glass to see the colours and all the detail. However, if you were to come into this church tonight, it would be very different. The beauty and pattern of the windows would be completely hidden. Without light shining through them, the glass looks black and lifeless.

Light makes such a difference to our lives.

Light shows us the way.

Light helps us to see things that are otherwise hidden.

Light takes away fear.

Light gives warmth, comfort, reassurance.

Light gives hope of a brighter future.

In the Bible, light is always used to speak of God's presence. At the very beginning of time itself all was in darkness, and God said "Let there be light." John's Gospel speaks of the birth of Christ, as light coming into the world. On the mountain of transfiguration, Jesus' face shone with a special radiance.

In the Bible, light is often used as a metaphor to speak of God's love and his power to guide, to heal and to transform. Without his teaching, without his example, without the guidance of his spirit, it is as if we are living in darkness.

During the winter months, we all get used to going to work and returning home in the dark. If I come into the church during the evening, I need to remember to bring my torch, as the light switches are all at the opposite end of the church to the door! On the occasions when I forget, the only way of safely negotiating the steps and not bumping into anything en-route, is to very cautiously feel the way forward.

I remember a number of years ago when I was training for ordination, I had gone to meeting in a remote Dorset Village. It was still daylight when we began, but when we came out from the meeting it was pitch black. Again, I found my way carefully along the lane. But then, I found that I really couldn't tell which was my car. There were about 6 in a line, and in the dark, there was no way of telling the colour, or even the make of the car, so I had to try my keys in each door until I found the one that opened! It could have been a little embarrassing if anyone had seen me.

We are all aware of this contrast between living and moving in the light, and being in the darkness.

John's Gospel in particular, helps us to think about the way in which Jesus brings light into our lives. If we focus our eyes on the teaching and example of Jesus and take all that he says and shows us to heart, the light of God's love has the power to drive out all the darkness that we may feel inside ourselves, and guide us forward.

Just for a moment, I would like us to think of our lives as a house.

In anyone's house, there are a number of different rooms. I am sure that in your house, there are rooms that you prefer to keep the door closed to when you have visitors -

The room where you keep all the clutter.

The room you haven't had a chance to clean and tidy for a while.

The room where the washing is drying.

The kitchen where all the pots and pans have been piling up during the day, waiting to be washed up and put away.

There are other rooms, where you enjoy entertaining others and allowing them to see the surroundings.

In exactly the same way, in the house represented by our lives, there are probably a number some rooms where we keep all those things of which we feel ashamed, guilty or afraid. The metaphorical attic, basement, or garage.

There are probably places inside us, where we have allowed things to accumulate. We keep the door shut because we don't want to be reminded, or we don't want others to see.

What are all these things that we might want to keep hidden?

They can be fears or anxieties.

They might be old behaviours, attitudes, or ways of doing things that we have found it difficult to shake off.

They might be the memories of things that we have said or done, that have hurt other people and of which we feel ashamed.

They will be different for each one of us.

I think that the message in our Bible reading today, is that we need not fear. If we open the door to allow the light of God's love to come in, it will help us to see those old fears, anxieties, worries and things of which we are ashamed in a different way.

All the time the door is shut and the light kept out, nothing can change. But if we open the door and allow the light of God's love in, he helps us to clear out the mess, so that those things that have been troubling us can be put behind us, and not just shut away.

I would like to share with you a meditation that I wrote a few years ago in an attempt to reflect much of what we are thinking about in our service today.

***The light of your love,
Soft and gentle,
makes even the darkest night bright.
Shine your light into my mind,
Clear and bright, every area of darkness find.***

***Banish from within me
The fears that take hold;
The doubts, the worries,
The uncertainties and dread,
All those negatives that fill my head.***

***Grief and sorrow,
guilt and shame,
memories of things said and done
casting dark shadow
til in the light of your love they fade and go.***

***In the multitude of choices,
Keep me following your path.
And if by mistake or design
I should go astray,
Light my path back to your eternal way.***

***When all seems lost,
And darkness surrounds me;
Fill me with your light of hope;
As at dawn, the darkness fades away
And the sun heralds a new day.***

Today then, may we each have the courage to open our hearts and minds to God, so that we may be flooded by the light of his love.

The light that drives out all darkness,

The Light that shows us the way.

The Light that helps us to see things that are otherwise hidden.

The Light that takes away fear.

The Light that gives warmth, comfort, reassurance.

The Light that gives hope of a brighter future.

The Light that heals and transforms.

Amen.