

Dear Friends,

I remember some years ago visiting a cave system. We were deep underground, we'd walked quite a long way from the surface. Then just to show what it was like the guide turned off all the lights. It was completely pitch black, you literally couldn't see your hand in front of your face. I don't think any of us really felt very comfortable in the pitch black. After a while the lights were turned on again much to everyone's relief. If the lighting had broken down completely I'm not sure how we would have got out. There is something about darkness that unnerves us. The image of light and darkness is one that is used extensively in Christian circles. We know that Jesus is often described as the light, we refer to him as the light of the world.

In this week's gospel reading from John we hear about John the Baptist as the one who came to tell people about the light that Jesus brought into the world. A bit later in the gospel (John 5:35) Jesus refers to John the Baptist as a light who bore witness to the true light found in Jesus himself. John the Baptist prepared the way, he was the forerunner. He attracted a huge crowd by his preaching, he raised awareness and expectation.

When John was arrested and chucked into prison, he was largely forgotten. By then Jesus was teaching the crowds and performing miracles. People could see the inbreaking of the kingdom of God. But the miracles could easily be misinterpreted - other people did amazing things as well. Too many people were interested in the gimmicks and the tricks rather than the truth. The Old Testament also pointed forward to Jesus, but it didn't do so incontrovertibly. Some of the things Jesus did didn't really fit with what was expected of the Messiah, so he wasn't recognised by most people.

John the Baptist, the miracles, the Old Testament, they all pointed to Jesus, but they didn't offer proof of the truth, the reality. The tragedy is that so many people heard these testimonies, but they didn't realise the truth they pointed to. Crowds of people went out into the desert to hear John the Baptist, crowds of people went to witness the miracles of Jesus, most people knew the Old Testament scriptures well. But most of them didn't move beyond the pointers to reach the truth.

How effective are we at helping people today to move beyond the pointers to the reality of God's love for us in Jesus? The Bible points to the truth but we can ignore it. The Church points to the truth, but the Church is ignored by increasing numbers of people. The lives of great Christians in the past point to the truth, but they can safely be left in history. How effective are we at helping people to follow these pointers and arrive at the truth, the truth we celebrate at this time of the year, the truth of God's love for us in Jesus.

Best wishes,

Mark