



THE NEW SHOFAR

Loving others is the panacea the world needs

Reach out in love and charity - act today

Lent 4

Only God can save us now!

It is vital to appreciate the biblical background to this ending to chapter seven in John's Gospel. It was the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles and the people were turning to God in hope. They were anticipating that future time when *life-giving water* would flow from the Temple in Jerusalem and fill them with hope for the future in a time when they were dominated by pagan Rome. This water was first of all physical water in the form of rain but then the waters of salvation emanating from God's throne. It would refresh the oppressed land of Israel and its people, just as it had for their ancestors when God brought water from the rock (during the Exodus). It is what they understood as a saving gift from God.

SALVATION



The most significant aspect of the biblical gift of salvation is the way it brings together two imperatives. It is the way God delivers us **FROM** whatever it is holding us down, harming us spiritually or in other ways crushing all hope and joy from our lives. Equally important is the way it is a *saving FOR* some role of great importance for the salvation God brings to all who believe in him, for the salvation of the whole of creation. People who are saved are beginning a new era, a new stage in their lives. Only by actively starting to live in this new way does salvation open up this new life for the believer.

To find salvation we need first of all to thirst

It is remarkable take note of what is happening in today's press. How many times have we heard: "the world will never be the same again"; Or, "this is the end of the world as we know it". We are presented with example after example of base humanity coming to the fore. There is hording, price gouging, arrogance, rudeness and a feeling of it now being a world of every man and woman for themselves! How thin is our veneer of civilization! When science fails us, the stock-market collapses, jobs become rarer, financial resources wither and we become suspicious of strangers, from where does our hope come?

Our world is simply not used to the idea that medicine, science and the market economy are limited in their ability to meet our every need and solve every human problem. We are not used to accepting our fragility and struggle to cope with the way a simple virus can bring the whole of the "civilised" world to its knees. Who would have believed it as our new year began? In many quarters, panic has taken over and the more we are pressed into social isolation and the fear of contagion, the more there is the danger of finding charity, love and mercy diminishing.

Produced by Bishop Michael Hough for the Disciples of Christ -

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This is the now time of the Kingdom

When all else fails our world, the **now** element of the gift of salvation is clearer. Christians must be the ones to stand up and live the way of the Kingdom. This is the kind of moment **FOR which** we have been saved. Here is a question: *how many people have we contacted to check up and make sure they are alright, have the basics of food, medical care and reassurance that they are not forgotten?* Now is the time for “boots-on-the-ground” Christianity, a time for fighting to keep our Church growing and even surviving (these are also times of financial crisis for the parish) and for reaching out in love. This is the ministry **FOR which** we have all been called. If we cannot bring Christ’s love alive in practical ways in a situation such as the present Corona virus mayhem, when will we make Christ manifest to the world?

if anyone is thirsty let them come to me and drink (deeply).

What is important in this promise of Jesus is the way he is declaring an end to the need for a Feast of Tabernacles. The hopes and needs of the people are now fulfilled in our union in Christ. It is Jesus who now replaces the feast with his own body, with his life, his death, his resurrection and his glorious ascension. All that is now required is a thirst for God, an acknowledgement that in key areas of our lives, we are empty, that something is missing, and the world can no longer fix it. Hope is the gift of God for all who turn to Him by living in Christ. Looking at the faces of those lining up outside Centre Link offices, there is a need for such an easily accessible gift of hope.

Life does have “from above” characteristics

One of the great voids in our contemporary world is its unwillingness to acknowledge the importance of a spiritual dimension, what John in his Gospel calls a *from above* dimension. If it cannot be measured and analysed in a test tube, then it cannot be real – at least in the eyes of many. Then there are the vast numbers who find it impossible to believe in God because of the failures of institutional religion and her leaders to live what their faith proclaims.

There is no better time for the Church and for Christians to take seriously the Lenten call to repent of these failures and to take up the Gospel message proclaimed by Jesus – to satisfy the thirst of the people of our time. Where contemporary world values, processes, priorities and institutions fail to slake the thirst of so many desperate people, Christians do have an antidote. Not to the physical virus, but to the immense harm it is inflicting on individuals and communities. As has been the case in so many times in past human history: plagues, war, diseases - such as plagues, leprosy, cholera, Ebola, T.B and the like - it has been the followers of Christ who have led the way to recovery by their selfless Gospel living; through their love, charity and willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of others, even complete strangers.

Take up your cross (vocations) and follow me

Easter is the celebration of a new era in human history, a time when in Christ we live in the world in a different way. In the beginning, this “different way” brought with it martyrdom, imprisonment and exile. But in the end, the world was won over by *the love they show, one for another*. Not much has changed and people today are looking for hope, for light and for life beyond the virus. This is the world **for which** we have been saved. All that is needed now is for us to reach out, even with our limited opportunities, to those who thirst for hope and love.

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