



January 24<sup>th</sup>

## **THE NEW SHOFAR**

**Seek first the Kingdom of God...**

**And all these things will be added to you**

*The people that walked in darkness, have seen a great light:*

Isaiah and the prophets well understood how oppressive life can seem to be for people struggling under all kinds of human situations. Israel had experienced the horror of invasion and exile, an end to their presence in a land given to them by God. Could life be any more painful? Or dark? From where does the bright spark of hope come when all else seems to be closing in around them?

The answer Isaiah offers is as clear as it is simple: history has an Author, and the destiny of all people rests in the hands of God. Their vocation then begins with faithfulness. Any revival of their nation depends on a return to that faithful living.

*You worship an Unknown god*

One of the realities we face today is a breakdown in trust in institutional Christianity and scepticism towards nearly all other institutions and people in positions of leadership and authority. In our world every man and woman is a god and with so many gods running the world – history and the meaning of life – who needs a Gospel or an external moral code? Is there room for Truth when every truth is equal?

In the Holy Spirit our contemporary individualistic societies should be fertile fields for Christian evangelism as we have been here before. The Christian Gospel has always been a radical alternative for people in a rootless world in which everything is relative (in theory). It broke into history in a time as cosmopolitan, as rootless as our own and it changed the world with the Good News it lived and proclaimed.

The apostles and prophets touched the world with their message of the selfless love of Jesus Christ and offered Him as the answer to their obsession with power and selfish pursuit of the things of this world. It was Christ they preached as the answer to life's questions, to their search for the ultimate truth. As Paul preached to the Athenians at their altar to an Unknown god – *What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I announce to you...* (c.f. **Acts 17:22-33**) – it was God who made this world and in Him alone *we live and move and have our being*.

Paul was short, sharp and to the point. There was no accommodating the sensitivities of the Athenians and turning God into one more “statue” in the Areopagus. God was *the* answer to their searching, their yearning and only by beginning in God could

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they come to understand and experience what that meant. It is a message of great importance for today's world where the search for Truth has led our communities into a quagmire of a multitude of "truths", none of which is absolute.

### ***Christianity does not prioritise relevance***

Central to our crisis as Church today was the quest for relevance, our desire to accommodate all manner of thinking into our Gospel living. As long as we 'loved', nothing else mattered; all was acceptable to God. The 60's and 70's saw the Church trying to adapt to the cultural movements of the time rather than changing the excesses of the culture. The priority seemed to have been a moving away from the doctrines, traditions and authority of the wider Christian past. Our leaders preached an ambivalence to the role of Scripture, creeds and the practices they had inherited. The harder moral teachings were downplayed and those appealing to either scripture and/or tradition pushed to the fringes of the Church as being too "conservative".

We should have learned by now how this is not the way for renewing the place of the Church in a world searching for meaning and purpose, for a sense of security and hope. The only way is God and our willingness to submit to Divine Rule. As T.S.Eliot once remarked *For us, there is only trying, the rest is not our business*. Rather than deifying the individual, we need to acknowledge that the future is beyond our ability to control. It sits under the divine authority.

### ***Our next step is to strive to be holy in the way God is holy***

When Jesus called the fishermen, His first expectation was that they *come and follow him*. That demand has not changed and as we know from human history, in every age of darkness for the Church, great saints have arisen to return us to this quest of coming to Christ (St Francis, John Wesley, Mother Teresa....). They effectively resurrected the faith in moments of death through the witness and example of their faith in Christ Jesus. They made no apologies for what God was demanding of the world. Nor did they attempt to water down the challenging Way that needed to be followed if light was to once again shine on a world and unite it in divine love.

What then is needed in our parishes are more believers willing to demonstrate in word and in deed how the Good News of Jesus Christ is not exhausted in our televangelists, demagogues, self-help gurus or a political saviour. We need to build fertile faith communities from which future Francis of Assisi can arise. The only thing that can justify the ongoing ministry of any parish (or denomination, or the Church) is a vibrant holiness. It is our sanctity that makes the case for the value and importance of faith. Only sanctity can bring salvation alive for our world.

Individual and personal holiness is the only enduring response to worldly excess and corruption. To make any difference in the world, Christianity must be lived – not as a means of social cohesion or national renewal but as an end in itself. To save the world we must first save ourselves...*seek first the kingdom of God...*

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