

In the beginning was the Word

A sermon preached by The Revd Viv Bridges on Sunday 27 December 2020 in St Peter's Wolvercote

I suspect that St John is for you (as he is for me), one of the saints we value most. I also suspect that the Bible words that have meant most to you, (as they have to me), are the wonderful words of the Prologue to his Gospel

– In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Without him was not anything made that was made. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we beheld his glory....full of grace and truth.

I was struggling with what to say today because I deeply wanted to do justice to this great Saint – but then Tony's Christmas Eve sermon did it all for me. So I shan't say too much, but I urge you to go and look at Tony's sermon if you haven't done so.

Tony told us a great deal about St John, confirming that he is also the Saint that Tony values most, and giving many reasons. Tony quoted from William Barclay's commentary on John's Gospel, and I'm going to quote a bit more. Barclay says '*John's Gospel is the look on which above all many Christians feed their minds and nourish their souls, and in which they rest their souls*'. Barclay goes on to explain why the 'beast' that represents St John is the eagle. He says '*the eagle alone of all living creatures can look straight into the sun and not be dazzled. John has the most penetrating gaze of all the New Testament writers into the eternal mysteries and the eternal truths, and the very mind of God. Many people find themselves closer to God and to Jesus Christ in John than in any other book in the world*'. So St John seems to understand and connect very directly with Christ, and with God. And perhaps this is what those amazing words from the Prologue do – they seem to pierce deeply, straight into our souls. Although they are full of extraordinarily deep theology, they actually don't need any theological explanation in order to communicate with us. Our souls and hearts leap whenever we hear them – and it is only after this that we may begin to want to find out something of the depth of meaning contained in those words.

John put Jesus outside of time, and yet also in time: '*In the beginning was the Word*' – and yet '*the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*'. As we prepare to greet the New Year, we probably think quite a lot about 'time'. Its qualities seem to change – it goes quickly when we are enjoying ourselves but slows down when life is tough. So, this last year should have gone very slowly, and yet it doesn't seem that long since that first lockdown in March. But we shall all be glad to bid farewell to 2020, and to turn to the hopes that we have for 2021.

Tony mentioned a lot about the different hopes we might have had during Advent, and we keep hold of hopes of better things for the New Year. One thing we know for certain is that the days will start to get longer. I know for me short days and very gloomy days always make things seem much worse. And we also have the certainty that vaccines will change the health situation. This will take a long time, and it will take very much longer to sort out the economic situation, the employment situation and so on. But we must hang on to HOPE, because, much greater than these earthly hopes is the hope we have in God, through Jesus Christ.

Many of us will be praying for a miracle – that coronavirus wears itself out and diminishes. We must continue to pray – but Jesus taught us that he didn't come to magic an easy life for us. What he did bring, however, was support and encouragement – that if we believe and trust in him, he will be with us as we battle along. He knows the path of suffering, and he knows the reality of resurrection and new life.

Many of us who have managed to get through these past awful months will acknowledge that we have done this through love. Through the love and generosity of others, and through our certainty that God loves us, whatever is happening all around us. St John understood about God's love for us. From his first Epistle Chapter 4 '*In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.*' and '*God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them*'. John also understood that God is with us always. He knew that Jesus was God made man 'in time', but because of his resurrection he is with us always, still. The Holy Spirit is still very alive and kicking – and will be there always to support and help us through.

I pray that God will bless you all, that you will all know his love, and his presence with you, to support and guide you in what we hope will be a year of relief and comfort and joy. Amen