

Advent 3 - Rejoice Rejoice Emanuel, God is with us

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[0 : 00] So, are you ready for Christmas? Oh, I heard a groan. Charles Dickens wrote in a Christmas carol, I will honour Christmas in my heart and I will try to keep it all of the year.

I will live in the past, I will live in the present and the future. The spirits of all three will strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach.

I think when it comes to Christmas, we have a lot of lessons that maybe we have learnt down the years. And what lessons maybe have we learnt this Advent as we're preparing in our journey about our relationship with Jesus?

Because that's what Advent is all about. It's growing and deepening that relationship each and every one of us have with Jesus and others around us. We've lit our third Advent candle, a visual reminder of our Advent journey.

One more candle to go before we light that final one on Christmas Day, the one that we have been preparing for, Jesus coming into the world.

[1 : 16] A meeting with Jesus is and always will be a life-changing experience. I hope you have, and I hope you are experiencing that.

Because life with Jesus is exciting. We can look around at the doom and gloom of the world, but living life with Jesus is exciting. I met a young adult yesterday desperately, desperately seeking Jesus afresh in his life.

The Jesus he knew so well in his childhood that was so real, so awesome, so wonderful. But somewhere along the way in life had lost the wonder and the zeal that Jesus brings.

Where did we lose that? Maybe where have we lost that? It's Scout and Guide and Uniformed Services, the organisation this week, gathered in here all the uniformed organisations.

It was amazing. But we spoke and focused on the Chief Scout, which is Bear Grylls. Bear Grylls is the Chief Scout.

[2 : 29] He has an influence over 40, I think it's 400,000 young people and their leaders. And he was baptised in the River Jordan in October.

He wanted to tell the world and he wanted to show the world what it means to be a Christian in the setting in which he is. He said, The Jesus story is so amazing, it seems wherever Jesus went, that new birth, new life, a new vision followed.

I hope that's been your experience, because it's certainly been mine. Jesus never ceases to amaze us and surprise us in that which he brings and that which he came to bring into each and every one of our lives and the lights in the people that we reach.

And I hope like me as well, as we lit that third candle, we were reminded of the courageousness of what this Christian journey is all about.

Because it takes courage. It takes courage, as Bear Grylls will know, to jump out of planes to do everything that he does. What's his motivation? I think it's about Jesus and he made that known in the River Jordan.

[3 : 50] What's our motivation? And what makes us courageous? Bear Grylls said, remember this, You have a light within you, the Holy Spirit, and wherever you go, you will bring a greater light than the darkness around you.

I'm going to read that again, because I think that's a so important message for this season. You have a light within you, the Holy Spirit, and wherever you go, you will bring a light greater, greater than the darkness around you.

Our scripture today reminds us of that, what it means to be a light carrier in the situations in which we bring. I remember the story of the starfish, you may have heard it before, of all these starfish that are washed up onto a beach, and they're likely to stay there and die as the tide goes out.

And there's a boy that was there, and all he was doing is throwing one at a time back into the water. A guy came over to him and said, You know, it's futile. What difference are you making? And he said, I'm making a difference to that one, and I'm making a difference to that one. One by one by one by one, we can be light carriers into the darkness that people may be experiencing this Christmas and in the year to come.

[5 : 16] Our scripture today reminds us of the hope that we have in that Christ light that each and every one of us carries. Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you.

This is God's will for you in Jesus Christ. What do people see when they see us? What do people see when they see us? Are we carrying that light into the community? Are we carrying that light into the situations in which we bring? Are we carrying that light into our prayer life as well? Giving thanks and rejoicing for the small things, but the big things in eternity that happen.

I've been so blessed this week with opportunities, opportunities that gave me to meet people that I haven't met before and have really, really light-centered conversations with people.

It's a blessing that we can bring, and it's a blessing that comes to us. If you have met with Jesus, you will know how powerful that relationship with our Lord and Savior is, and how prayer is central to the closeness of that experience in the everyday conversation.

[6 : 33] Somebody asked me what my morning prayer was in the morning. What's the first thing that you pray about, Vicar? Where's the reply? I said, my basic prayer is, Lord, help me not to miss the opportunities you're going to show me today.

That's my first prayer of the day. Lord, help me not to miss the opportunities that you're going to show me today. Isn't it awful when we know that we've missed those opportunities?

We will know them. We will know them of maybe those opportunities where we know we should have just stepped in, maybe asked and prayed at that moment, Lord, give me the words.

Give me the words to say. What do you want me to do? What do you want me to join in with, with what you're already doing in this person's life that I've met today? Show me because I'm ready, because the light is burning in me and I want to do that.

That meeting with him day in and day out, 24-7. In that confidence of Jesus' words, I am with you always. I'm not just with you on a Sunday between 10.30 and 11.30.

[7 : 42] He is here. But as we know, it's 24-7 in what we do. Relationship. It's that relationship that Bear Grylls testifies to that gives him courage, boldness, trust and faithfulness to be an influencer to all those young people and the 100,000 leaders that they reach and looks after them each week.

This conversation yesterday with this young man was very important. It was just such a blessing. And we had a wedding here yesterday where, again, it was such a blessing to see two young people committing to each other in their vows, promising before God to invest heavily in their lifelong commitment not only to one another but to Jesus, to keep Jesus at the centre of all they were doing, to keep that light burning brightly in their marriage and in their life.

Investing in a relationship, investing in a relationship, as we all know, is so important. But it takes energy and it takes time. If you truly want to invest in a relationship, it doesn't just happen like that. We have to invest. It's the same with our Lord. We invest in that heavily. Why? Because he has invested so much in us. That's why he came. And I guess this scripture, this points out in our Advent journey, calls us to ask, how much have we invested in our relationship with Jesus?

That's what I've been pondering on in this Advent journey. It's not a guilt trip, anything but. It's actually a huge encouragement. How much have we invested in our relationship with you, Lord?

[9 : 31] And what more, what more can I invest in this relationship that brings this light brighter to meet with other people in the community and make a difference, like the starfish, one at a time.

One person at a time. Martin Luther said, prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance. It is laying hold of his willingness. And this is the God who longs, longs to connect with us.

So much that he sent his only son that we've seen so marvelously this morning, portrayed, yeah. But so often we shut him out. We just close down, or at least when things are going well, we shut him out.

We often forget that God is with us and for us in everything. Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

God's will for you and me. Emmanuel, God with us. It doesn't come any more awesome than that for this world, for what we're celebrating at the moment, and what we will celebrate with the world in a couple of weeks' time.

[10:44] Jesus coming again and all things being made new. Amen. Eternity with him. Amen. Amen. Eternity with him. But life with him now.

And so Paul goes on then. It's no wonder he says, do not quench the spirit. Do not quench the spirit. Don't let the light grow dim. I have to tell you, friends, there have been Christians, and we maybe know that in life, maybe Christians and non-Christians, who have poured buckets of cold water on us.

Don't know whether you've ever experienced that. People who will try to dampen the spirit in us, the zeal and excitement of the light that we carry. And so Paul says to a whole community, please, please, please, don't quench the spirit.

Don't let cold-hearted, unkind words and actions in any attempt quench what the Lord is doing. Because the Lord is greater than that.

Hold to that zeal. Maybe you are one who has been on the receiving end. Rejoice in that. Don't get drowned. Drowned. Don't get drowned in the lukewarm discouragement of others and of the news.

[12:00] Don't let it drown you in what the world wants to bring in darkness. Because the light has come into the world, and the world cannot stop it.

It is there. Of those who seek to water down doctrine and beliefs that we've held down the ages, don't be drowned in that. Hold fast to what was given.

As the light shines. Paul said, hold on to what is good and reject what is evil. And we know what that is, because if we're walking closely with Jesus, we will know.

That rabbinic phrase that comes to me again and again, may you be covered in the dust of your rabbi. You're walking so closely to Jesus that you will know what is good, but you will certainly know what is evil.

So let's ground that. God's good and pleasing will for our lives in our Advent journey this year. So I'm going to ask you this week to go and reflect. What has encouraged you?

[13:05] What is encouraging you at the moment? And give thanks for that. Where have you seen the Holy Spirit at work? Where have you experienced the Holy Spirit at work in your life?

Where have you encouraged others in what the Holy Spirit is doing? And have you shared the good news with others rejoicing in the good news that we have to share?

You know, if you, like me, are still at that last moment of Christmas shopping and you are looking for the greatest gift, then give them Jesus because it will be the greatest gift that you will give them to share with them.

It's that, it's that beautiful. And I suppose the other question is, are you known and seen for rejoicing?

Are we a people who people see the light shining and we can rejoice in amongst the darkness to be a beacon? I often think when I look at this place, wherever you go in Clevedon, you can see the church, a city on a hill cannot be hidden.

[14:30] You don't place it. You don't place the lights under a table, Jesus said. You place it on a stand where people can see. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

You can't miss this place when you walk past. You can't miss this place when you drive into Clevedon. You can't miss this place when you drive up the M5 and you just think, I'm home. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

And we are those light carriers that go from here into the community that we reach each miss. Amazing. Amazing. The good news is, this week, is tomorrow in this church, we will commission pupil chaplains in St. Nicholas Chantry School.

Six young people who will be light carriers in their community and in their school day by day by day as chaplains in the playground, in their class, wherever they go.

And so here, as they meet in their carol service tomorrow, we will commission them in front of the whole school so they will know that they are light carriers for others.

[15:42] I'm so encouraged by the news that I hear. I'm so encouraged this week, even on the news, if you look for it, there is good news to rejoice about.

A six-year-old who gets up early in the morning with his mum and dad and they make sandwiches to go out and give to homeless people who have slept rough on the street on his way to school

because that was his heart to do that.

That is a light shining in the darkness. What a difference that makes and what a difference that has made to me to rejoice and hear that good news one by one by one by one.

Look at the darkness one by one. It makes the difference. Don't quench it. Rejoice because God is with us. Maybe this candle, this third candle that we've lit is a reminder today as we draw closer to draw near to that which has changed your life and has changed mine and will change hundreds of others if we allow and share that good news with them.

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you, free you from sin through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be left blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ because the one who is faithful, who calls you, is truly faithful and he will do it.

[17:17] The good thing about a light is it dispels doubt. I just want to encourage you as we go today, if you have any doubt in your mind at all, if you're listening to this podcast, if you have any doubt that what you do in eternity doesn't make a difference, dispel the doubt because the light dispels the darkness and the doubt.

Believe you me, conversations that we have had with people, we don't know the seeds that we have sown. Have the conversations. Many of the young people here will have been here because you as parents and grandparents have shared that good news and lived the life in your homes. And it's made a difference for a generation that will grow and tell people about Jesus. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

Freed from sin through and through, see our whole spirit, soul and body will be kept blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. So the question is, are we ready?

Are we expectant? Are we excited? Are we excited? Some people actually nodded there for the podcast. Are we nodded? Are we excited?

[18:38] Are we enthused? Are we encouraged? But most of all, most of all, is that light shining brightly in us. Are we filled with the Holy Spirit, ready in anticipation for his coming, for those that we will invite, for those people that we will go home now, and prompted to pick up the phone, to knock on a neighbour's door, to say, would you like to come to a carol service tonight?

Why? Because we're going to come and we're going to celebrate and we're going to meet with Jesus. I think this scripture is for each and every one of us in the body of Christ today.

I think it's such a timely scripture on this third Sunday of Advent. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. And we often go with a blessing and we say, send us out in the power of the Holy Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.

Maybe again, that should be our prayer for every day as we meet with him. Lord, today, would you send me out in the power of your Holy Spirit to live and to work to your praise and glory that people may see the nightlight, the light that's shining within me.

I was thinking today about how, as you always do with a sermon, how do you end this off? How do you end this message? And I just felt while I was praying that the third candle for many people might be a prophetic sign.

[20:13] It might be a prophetic sign today as the Spirit's power refilling you afresh with that sense of courage, boldness, a fresh sense of zeal and a desire, a deep, deep desire, again, to make him known.

A light that shines afresh in your life this Advent, a light that will shine out into the people's lives around you, a renewed expectation, maybe a new urgency to serve him and make him known, to deepen that relationship in the everyday that we have with him.

But I'd invite you to stand. If you'd just like to stand with me this morning and I'm just going to pray a prayer over us just to invite him afresh into our lives, maybe that third candle for you is a prophetic sign today.

A fresh sense and move of the Holy Spirit is we renounce anything at all, anything that has quenched the Spirit of God in our lives, anything at all that has deterred us or dampened that lamp that shines within us.

And we ask him now, Holy Spirit, would you come and would you rekindle that flame within us, that light of your Holy Spirit within us that would shine ever brighter in every setting, Lord?

[21:58] Holy Spirit, would you come and do that now? Lord, would you ask you, each of us, would we ask you now, would you ask and would you pray, come Holy Spirit, come Holy Spirit, we pray.

Grow that light within me. Sense for some, it's emboldening our bolding, emboldening our bolding and encouraging our courage. just sense a picture of maybe where cold water has been poured that actually the light burns even brighter through that because of the God that we know and love and he will do it.

Amen. So as we just receive, let's just pray, prayer for us.

Go forth into the world in peace. be of good courage. Hold fast to that which is good. Render no one evil for evil.

Strengthen the faint-hearted. Support the weak. Help the afflicted. Show love to everyone. love, love and serve the Lord, rejoicing always in the power of the Holy Spirit.

[23 : 39] Thank you. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.