

Wednesday 5th August Simon Venn

Beacons in the Night

I remember climbing up to Melbury Beacon on the night of the 3rd of June 2002, when a chain of beacons was lit across the country **celebrating our Queen's Golden Jubilee**. It was a moving moment.

There, on the hilltop, the beacon basket stood out black against the evening sky. The wood was all in place, tinder dry and ready for the moment to ignite.

The lights came up from the Southwest. We saw one shining out in the distance, on Bull Barrow and that was our signal. And our beacon blazed out into the night. Then we saw the one light on Castle Hill in Shaftesbury, and then another further North and they went right up into Scotland, shining out a national celebration **for the long and faithful reign of our Queen**.

It was a powerful reminder of the way urgent messages were passed before the days of the mobile phone. Hilltop to hilltop the watchmen received the message and fired their beacons passing it on.

In a time of war, The Spanish Armada. - **In time of peace**, the Celebration of a Queen!

And a bit like the wise and foolish virgins, the vital key lay preparing the beacon. The kindling, the wood, the anointing oil (probably diesel!) were all charged and ready for the moment the signal came.

Then **a flash, a flicker** of flame, building into the roar of **a full-bodied blazing fire**, sending showers of sparks into the night sky as the message was shouted forward on its journey. **Selah!**

When Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, **his altar was a beacon lit by God**.

Declaring the power of the Lord Almighty and confounding the followers of Baal.

It was a mighty demonstration, and here it comes . . .

"With the stones he built an altar in the Name of the Lord and he dug a trench around it, large enough to hold two seahs of seed. (about twelve litres.) He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, '**Fill the jars with water** and pour it on the offering and on the wood.'

'Do it again,' he said and they did it again. **'Do it a third time,'** he ordered and they did it a third time.

The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.

At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed:

'Lord the God of Abraham Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, Lord, answer me, so that these people will know that you Lord are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.'

Even in the drama of this moment, can you feel God's heart wanting his people back?

THEN THE FIRE OF THE LORD FELL and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried,

'The Lord He is God, The Lord He is God!'

Selah!

This is the time of OUR evening sacrifice. The whole world is in confusion and the darkness is growing.

And when we come together as the Body of Christ, we represent a Beacon of his Kingdom, declaring:

"There is a God in Israel, there is a God in Dorset, there is a God over this whole earth and his name is Jesus, Yahweh, Jehovah, the "Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. And of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end." Is.9:6-7

And he is also the God of love and forgiveness, and the God of healing and hope.

Come before him, **feel the warmth** of his love, **let his mercy bring you to your knees**,

and **know his forgiveness** and his **embrace of welcome** over many **long lost sons and daughters** that will be coming home in these last days.

Wherever we gather, whether it's **in the courtyard at Lox Lane** on a Sunday morning, or on a **Wednesday night at Father's House**, or in **small groups at home** or **in our gardens** or even **in the open country**. We come together **to pray** and **to worship the God who holds this whole darkening world securely in his hands**.

He didn't give us Coronavirus, but he's using it – "In all things he works for the good of those who love him, who are called according to his purpose." Rom.8:28

When the Prodigal Son came to the end of his own resources – **he came to himself** – he looked in the mirror and saw he had nothing. And then he looked for **hope BEYOND HIMSELF to his Father's house** – **Would he be accepted? Could he be forgiven?** We are God's beacons lighting the way home.

Every time we come together to pray, we are placing the wood on the altar for him to ignite.

In many parts of the world, meeting to pray is forbidden, it's risky and threatened by the authorities.

It's unusual for us to find our gatherings are restricted, our buildings closed and even meeting in our homes tightly regulated. It makes us appreciate all over again, the joy of actually seeing each other and praying and worshipping together.

When we do come together, however many we are and wherever we meet, **God is with us**.

Jesus said "**Where two or three gather in my name there I am with them.**" Matt.18:20

However simple our meeting may be, we are building an altar even by our agreement to meet.

Our prayers are laying out the wood and **our worship** presents the sacrifice and we wait on God to breathe his fire over our faith and fill us afresh with his LIFE.

Your faith may feel small and fragile in today's world, but your strength is in him, this is **GOD'S WAY – His only way** to bring the world back home.

Boy scouts used to be taught how to make fire by rubbing two sticks together.

When we put our sticks together on an altar of worship – God lights the fire.

And we find that any group together in his name, becomes a lot more than the sum of its parts!

God loves a good bonfire!

When **Moses' Tabernacle** in the wilderness was finished, **God filled it with the cloud of His Presence**, and all Israel knew he was with them on their journey.

When **Solomon's temple** in Jerusalem was finished in all its grand embellishment with gold and precious stones. The first thing that happened at its grand opening was **the Cloud of God's Presence** filling the temple so the priests couldn't go in to perform their ceremonies!

And they all knew God was at home with them and dwelling in his house.

I can remember some awesome times at Bible Weeks in the past, at Harrogate, Builth Wells and Stoneleigh, when the programme was suspended by the awesome presence of God. Angelic singing and visions of angels. I've lain on the floor laughing my head off in Toronto overwhelmed by the joy of the Lord, and we have known many powerful worship times in Shaftesbury, which have sometimes left us on the floor or flowing off into tongues together, or hovering in silence with the weight of his Kabod glory over us.

At our first prayer meeting back in the building a few weeks ago, the joy of the Lord filled the house. He was pleased to be back with us in the place that bears his name, and we came away rejoicing that night.

Our first open-air worship in the courtyard at Lox Lane was glorious!

It wasn't just the **sunshine**, or the beautiful **cirrus clouds**, or the swooping flight of those **house-martins**, dipping over our heads like little angels. **God's presence filled our worship** and **inspired the ministry** and

gladdened our hearts, so that we left the farm that day, knowing we had met with God and HE had enjoyed meeting with us!
Selah!

It's quite amazing that the whole world is shaken by Coronavirus and its destabilising effect on life as we know it. Who could have imagined a global shutdown of travel, trade and commerce, and the financial power and pride of the nations brought to their knees by its levelling effect.

It's like a biblical plague in today's world.

God doesn't do anything that isn't foretold by his prophets. And there's nothing here today, that Jesus didn't describe in the signs of his coming.

And we are the children of the BOOK, as well as the BODY and the BLOOD and the SPIRIT of JESUS.

We should not be alarmed or taken by surprise by the events we're living in.

We know that through it all God is calling the world to attention.

Showing us the emptiness of mans' pride in the gods of wealth and power.

And offering "**the road less travelled by**" that leads to self-awareness and the need for something more than this world's goods and empty promises.

Leading to a cry for help that turns a whole life around towards the God who made us.

God can move mountains and cast them into the depths of the sea if he wants to, but when he speaks to the world these days, **he's chosen to do it through you and me.**

The Book of Acts begins by looking back to the gospels and saying . . .

"I wrote about all the things Jesus BEGAN to do and to teach, until the day he was taken up to heaven . .

We are **THE BODY OF CHRIST** for our generation, and the task falls to us to continue the story of God's love and the rescue of humanity.

Jesus spoke directly to the world, and we are HIS BODY in this age, and HIS WORDS of life are on OUR LIPS and written in OUR LIVES.

Paul urged us to COME TOGETHER to pray and encourage one another.

And whenever we do, in the snatched moments of casual meeting, or by deliberate agreement, OUR FAITH is rekindled by HIS PRESENCE and our LIVES blaze up again with the truth of HIS LOVE.

All I'm really saying is, **WE ARE HIS BEACONS SHINING IN THE DARK.**

Lighting the way home for the world God loves.

Every time we pray together, **every time we worship**, there is a fresh shower of sparks going up into the darkness. And the light of our faith is reaching into heaven.

SO AT EVERY OPORTUNITY LET'S BUILD THIS FIRE TOGETHER!

Isaiah got it right!

"Arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord rises upon YOU!

See darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples.

BUT THE LORD RISES UPON YOU and His glory appears over you." Is.60:1-2 **Selah!**

Praise God and have a great day!