

## I am the Light of the World – Nick Ball

- This week we focus on the I am saying in chapter 8, verse 12 of John's gospel, 'I am the light of the world'. Or to hear the whole verse, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.' The saying appears to stand on its own, rather than being expounded as the 'I am Bread of life' saying is in Chapter 6, but it actually connects with the opening of the story of Jesus healing the man born blind, which occupies the whole of John chapter nine, where in verse 5 Jesus says, 'As long as I am the world, I am the Light of the world'. Jesus goes on to heal the blind man and the rest of the chapter is devoted to the arguments that spin off from the healing miracle.
- In Elgar's Oratorio, the Light theme is prominent in the early parts of the work
- First in the opening item the blind man sings, 'O hateful is the night which hides Thee from my sight, O God! I pray for light'. Then a little later, Jesus sings the verse 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.' This leads into the chorus that explores the light theme in the following words, 'Light out of darkness Thou hast brought. Within the shadow of Thy cross now burns a light, Now burns a light, and we are taught the truer truths of human loss. Later in the chorus the light theme returns again, 'But so a beacon light Thou sent to signal through our night of grief: how Love upon his mission went, crowned with sorrow's sharp-set wreath. The light theme returns again in the final chorus of the oratorio, which starts, 'Light of the world, we know thy praise. And ends, 'therefore we thank Thee and we pray Thy light may shine unto the perfect Day on us for evermore.
- There are two occasions in the Christian year when we celebrate Jesus as the light of the world. The first is Christmas Night when we light the central white candle of the Advent wreath. There are different ways of giving the meaning of the four outside candles, which are either all red or three purple and one pink. My favourite labelling is the Patriarchs, the Prophets, John the Baptist and Mary. Then when Christmas arrives we light the white candle with these words or other words. 'Lord Jesus, Light of light, you have come among us. Help us who live by your light to shine as lights in your world. Glory to God in the highest. Amen.' The Advent wreath is usually lit until Epiphany.
- The other Christmas service at which candles are lit is the Christingle Service. The Christingle is an orange, which represents the earth, four fruits or sweets on cocktail sticks, which represent the seasons, a red ribbon to represent the blood of Christ and a candle, which represents Christ the Light of the World. A church filled with lighted Christingles is a very moving sight.
- The theme of Light is not just rooted in the 'I am' saying. It is also rooted in the Prologue of St. John's Gospel, where Jesus is hailed as 'the true light'. 'What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light

shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. The other gospels do not use the light symbol, except perhaps Matthew with his story of the Star of Bethlehem and the Magi following the star and a reference backwards to Isaiah's prophecy that the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

- The other time when we light candles is Easter when we light the Paschal Candle with the words, 'May the light of Christ, rising in glory, banish all darkness from our hearts and minds.'
- Unlike the Christmas candle the Paschal candle stands alone. Although the Easter candle focuses on the image of Christ as the light of the world, it is actually quite a complex symbol. It symbolises Christ as the beginning and the end, Alpha and Omega, and the wounds of Christ are represented by five nails pushed into the candle by the priest. As the candle is carried into the church the acclamation: 'The Light of Christ. Thanks be to God' is repeated three times and gradually all the lights in the church are lit.
- I mentioned how Christ, the Light of the world is portrayed in Elgar's music. The theme is also reflected in art. One of my favourite works of Christian art is Holman Hunt's Picture 'The Light of the World', where Jesus stands at an overgrown door holding a lamp and the caption is from Revelation 3.20 "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."
- So what difference does it make to our lives to hail Jesus as the Light of the World? First it means that when we gaze on Jesus as he is revealed to us in the gospels, we are gazing on God from God, Light from Light, true God from True God. When we gaze upon Jesus we see God as he is, and we worship and adore him as our Light.
- Then secondly when we look at the world we see a world that is illuminated by the light of Christ. We learn the true values of peace and justice and we are inspired to work with Jesus to build a world that reflects more of the glory of God.
- In the world where there is no shortage of darkness, but we are called to shine as lights in the world, reflecting the goodness of God and bringing light to the dark places of the earth.
- Let's end with one of the Collects for Easter
- GOD, who through the mighty resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ has delivered us from the power of darkness and brought us into the light of your kingdom: grant that as he was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life and seek those things that are above, where you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.