

Let Light Shine

A sermon for a service Celebrating Anglican Schools
and dedicating crested stained glass windows.
Readings: Psalm 19, Matthew 5:1-16

It is enormous privilege to conduct this service today. Like the windows that we have come to dedicate today I am new to this Cathedral, and new to the community of St. Michael's Collegiate School and The Hutchins School. But the links between these schools and this Cathedral go back to 1892 and 1846 respectively.

The link is not just with the institutions but also with the communities and those many students over many years who walked in "crocodile" down from the schools to the Cathedrals. It is wonderful to have this visual link between the schools and the Cathedral firmly in place.

The windows are in the Clerestory or clear story, a group of windows that are deliberately left clear to allow light into the Cathedral, and they do an amazing job. When I first arrived the south side windows were all boarded up and the Cathedral always seemed to be gloomy, but with the windows all in place and cleaned, let the light shine. Most days we don't need to have any lights on in here.

What you may not know though is that the clerestory windows are not as clear as they seem, they actually have a green tint, subtly altering the light as it enters.

Philosophically we all see the world through tinted glass, known as worldviews which alter how we see the world and the light it offers. I thought as we gather celebrating Anglican schooling it would be helpful to see what kind of world view we should have in our Anglican schools and would want our students to embrace.

LIGHT IN OUR WORLD (PSALM 19:1-6)

Psalm 19, seems like good place to start. C.S Lewis called this the greatest poem in the Psalter and indeed one of the greatest in human history. (Reflections on the Psalms, 56).

The Psalm starts by inviting us to take a very wide view indeed, to consider the heavens. A few years ago I visited a fishing village in the middle of Lake Victoria and the night sky was perhaps the most amazing thing I have ever seen. But where ever you look it is an impressive thing.

Bill Bryson in "A Brief History of Nearly Everything" notes that with the naked eye we can see around 2000 stars. With binoculars it goes up to 50,000, with a small 2 inch telescope 300,000, and with a reasonable 16 inch telescope between 50-100 thousand galaxies each containing billions of stars. The heavens are a truly amazing, of stunning dimensions.

This may cause us to wonder how it got like this, and why it is here. The Psalmist would think this was a little odd, the issue is not how, or why but who. The glorious heavens point to the glory of God, the mighty creator.

There is a particular focus on the Sun, which often in human history has been an object of worship. To worship the Sun, even just to lie under it and enjoy its warmth is to miss the point. Life under the sun should be lived in praise and worship of the God whose glory is so eloquently and vociferously declared by the heavens.

So part of our worldview as Anglicans should be one which embraces worship of God who has created all that is around us.

A good world

But such a worldview not only affects how we view God, but also how we see our world, we will see it as God's good world, not chaos, not an accident but a creation. From this start came much of the modern scientific enterprise. Unfortunately science and faith have often been divorced in our time but the early great scientists would have been horrified by this, they looked to understand the universe so that they would better understand the mind of God.

Such a view also endorses environmental concern, but not because the environment is good in and of itself, as the green movement often seems to believe, but because it is God's good world which we are to look after.

Such a world view will also embrace all the gifts of creativity which God has given, as we listen to a glorious piece of music, appreciate the beauty of art, enjoy the delight of laughter we are affirming the goodness of this world made by our God.

All these should form part of our world view and may our schools long see the world in this light.

LIGHT OF THE WORLD (PSALM 19:7-11)

The heavens may speak clearly about God's glory but they don't say much else. For that God needs to reveal himself. For this reason the Psalm changes tack after verse 7. The Psalm moves from that which appears to be important for life, the Sun, to that which is vital for really living, knowledge of God and his guidance for living. It moves from the revelation of God in nature to the revelation of the Lord in the Law of Israel.

It is important to note this change of name. The heavens speak of a powerful deity, a "god" if you will. In the Law, the Scriptures, the story of God's dealing with his people we discover what this God is like for he has revealed himself in the Law and the way that he has dealt with his people. He is Yahweh, the Lord, the covenant God of Israel.

This God has now most clearly revealed himself not in the Law, or the history of Israel, but in the person of his beloved Son, Jesus Christ. There we see most clearly what God is like.

In our worldview our understanding of God is to be firmly shaped by Jesus. It is interesting that as you read this part of the Psalm you can remove the references to the Law and replace it with Jesus and it is just as true if not more so. Jesus is the one who is trustworthy, gives light to the eyes and so on.

When I taught in high schools it was not uncommon for students to say that they didn't believe in God. I would always ask them about the God they didn't believe in and I could usually say that I didn't believe in that God either. We believe in the God shown to us in Jesus Christ.

Jesus himself make he enormous claim that he is the light of the world, that he is the true light about God. Against other claims to point to the light Jesus says that he is the light and God vindicates this claim by raising him from the dead.

The Beatitudes

It is important that we grasp this for the way of life that Jesus points us to is radically different from that which our society puts forward. We notice this as we hear the Beatitudes read. Jesus encourages a way of life that says that blessed are the poor, meek, humble, peacemakers and so on.

Does this sound like our culture? How would our world write its beatitudes? I had a go at writing a modern version

*Blessed are the rich in possessions for theirs is the Kingdom of this world
Blessed are those who are unconcerned for they shall not be troubled
Blessed are the powerful for they shall take the inheritance of others and get away with it.*

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for material wealth for there will always be more to get.

Blessed are the hardhearted for they shall obtain whatever they want no matter the cost

Blessed are the celebrities for they shall be seen by everybody

Blessed are the entertained for they shall be called children of television

Blessed are those who are always comfortable for then they are truly at home in the Kingdom of this world.

This could perhaps be best summed up in a T-Shirt that my daughter used to wear which said: "Last time I checked the world does revolve around me!"

Such self centredness is ultimately is to walk in the ways of darkness. Jesus calls us to walk in the way of service and have a world view that is focused on the needs of others. Jesus' willingness to die for us shows us that God is in the business of service. If we are to walk in Jesus' light we will have to let his example and words be light to our path and a lamp to our feet. It is when we embrace this way of living that we will be salt and light to the community of Hobart so that people will see our good deeds and praise our Father in Heaven.

Such a high view of humble service needs to be part of our world view of our schools so their students will walk in such light and God's light will shine through them.

LIGHT ON US. (PSALM 19:12-14)

Which brings us to the last part of our Psalm. We all tend to see ourselves through "Rose Coloured Glasses", or in Hutchin's case, magenta. Yet Psalm 19 having spoken of God's revelation in the Law and how it protects even rewards us then calls on us to consider how we match up to this call.

This Psalm encourages us to take off our rose coloured glasses and take a good long look at ourselves in the light of what God has revealed about himself and what he wants of us. It is quite scary because it asks God to deal with not only the sins we are aware of but also the ones we don't even realise that we are doing. God's light reveals our darkness. It is not about what is acceptable to us, but as the final verse of the Psalm reminds us, but what is acceptable to God, in whom there is no darkness at all.

It is because of this that part of Anglican worship has always been confession. We are regularly reminded of our human frailty and need of forgiveness. But we do so remembering that part of the light of God revealed in Jesus is that in his death he has dealt with our darkness. We come back to the light confident in God's forgiveness.

When we have such a world view, focusing on the good world that God has made, his revelation of himself in Jesus, and of his forgiving love, then as the light floods in through these windows so shall God light flood our lives and our schools.

Then we will humbly and thankfully pray may the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, or Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

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