

## ST JOHN THE DIVINE PATRONAL FESTIVAL

Proverbs 8:22-31

Psalms 97

1 John 1:1-15

John 20:2-8

*'This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.'* 1 John 1:5

### **Darkness – and Light – a memory**

The children's game 'Murder in the dark', played at a youth camp on an outback sheep station in the Diocese of Willochra, is a great memory of bluebush and saltbush scattered on the red dirt. At night, it was *very dark and just a bit scary*. Where was everyone hiding? What was that sound? There was such relief when the light of the full moon disclosed both hiding places and hazards.

### **You don't have to be in outback Australia to find darkness confronting.**

In darkness there is no clear vision of what's around us – good or bad.

As Autumn gives way to Winter and the hours of darkness increase, it's the light that we miss. The night darkness makes it hard to find our way, avoid dangers or find places of safety.

Darkness can be lonely. How many people, living on their own dread the onset of Winter with its short days and long nights? In the hours of darkness there is so little to do compared to the light; darkness is not usually the time to walk the dog or weed the garden or chat to the neighbours on the footpath. Darkness changes everything.

### **John 20:2-8**

Imagine the darkness in today's Gospel; the darkness of the rock tomb; the overpowering darkness of grief; the darkness of the disciple's fear;

*'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.'*

John 20:2

Imagine the contrast as the disciple who reached the empty tomb first, entered the darkness, saw the linen wrappings lying there and *'saw and believed.'* John 20:8 – and the light of the Risen Christ shone.

### **The disciple 'saw and believed:'**

The disciple saw and believed in Jesus; in his teaching; in his work; in his identity.

Truly, he was the Messiah.

The disciple saw and believed in Jesus' Resurrection; that the darkness of death had been overcome; that love had replaced hate; that the promises of the loving Father were fulfilled.

The disciple *'saw and believed.'*

Can you feel the light in these few words? It's the light of exuberant joy; of overwhelming emotion; of relief; of gratitude; of optimism; of all embracing love of Jesus and thankfulness and praise for the One who sent him into the world.

Can you hear the dynamic witness of the early church in the First Letter of John that we heard this morning? It has such vitality; such conviction and fervour:

*'We declare to you what was from the beginning; what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning (Jesus) the word of life. This life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us.'* 1 John 1:1-2

These words and this witness pierce the darkness of the world. The light of the Risen Jesus is dynamic, convincing, and energising – and fresh for every generation.

### **Our Community of St John the Divine has a Mission**

As we meet together as the Community of St John the Divine, inheritors of John's powerful witness and faith, it's the empty tomb and the light of the Risen Jesus that shines brightly in our lives. Like John, we rejoice in the presence of the Risen Jesus, and look with hope into a darkening world. Like John and the other disciples - we have a mission.

### **The darkness of Domestic Violence**

This week, in a street I pass every week, a young woman lost her life. It's brought into stark reality the tragedy of domestic violence and its proximity to all of us. There is deep darkness very close to all of us. On average, one woman loses her life every week in Australia due to domestic violence.

How do we bring the light of Christ into our own neighbourhood? How do we speak effective words of outrage when such terrible things happen? How do we advocate so that family violence is not repeated? How do we support those who are in danger in the streets where we live? There is such an imperative to *do something*, to be active in our faith and determined to shine light into every darkness we encounter.

It's not hard to identify the opportunities we have; the homeless live on our streets; the hungry can find a meal in our building; the addicted can come here for friendship and support from NA or AA. Our Supportive Friends Group takes Welcome Packs to a local Women's Refuge. Our Kindergarten staff work hard to nurture and teach little children.

At St John's, we are developing an action plan to do more; to be more intentional, more active and involved – but so much depends on our willingness to be a faith community living in the light, welded together in love, in faith and action; supporting and encouraging each other; affirming each other and opening ourselves to the surprising possibilities for action that the Holy Spirit will reveal. Living in the light means affirmation of each other, not criticism. It means living truly Christ like lives. It means dispelling every darkness.

As we celebrate our Patronal Festival today, let us all choose to dispel darkness and live in the light; celebrating Jesus' Resurrection; remembering his teaching and pledging our love. Today, may we all be here with thankful hearts for God's forgiveness and grace; for the outpouring of God's love and light in our lives and for the task we have accepted to share light and love in our world.

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