

429 Candles and Daffodils

Tuesday 22nd March 2021 was the first anniversary of the first “national lockdown” introduced in March 2020. Little did anyone know back then what this global pandemic of Covid-19 was going to involve, and looking back as we now do from our biblical perspective, there is much to observe and prayerfully ponder.

It has been “quite a year”. Here is a list of events mentioned with little comment, worthy of our prayerful reflections. Pandemically: massive government borrowing, financial support and surveillance; the deification of “science”; huge economic disruption; schools shut; “Covid death rates” announced daily, whether or not due to Covid (and no mention of the higher abortion death rates); a marked “poverty gap”; more government handouts expected and demanded; the stretched NHS; remarkable vaccines produced and applied on a vast scale; and much basic goodwill found at many levels and in many ways.

Politically: the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis giving rise to violent rioting in many western cities, fanned by the Marxist Black Lives Matter movement; deriding of western history and culture; the end of the “Brexit” transition period; the change of American President; continuing Islamic tensions, atrocities and migration; Israel standing solid; the first-ever papal visit to Iraq by the first-ever Jesuit Pope; China and Russia seen as growing threats; future wars to involve cyberspace attacks, space weapons, drones, severed undersea cables and nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.

Biblically under the Lord, what are we to make of such a year and of such a world? We see confusion, chaos, strife, violence, apprehension, weariness. We see frequent over-reaction and loss of perspective. We see yet again the massive effects, some positive and many negative, of social media. Truly, “many hearts are failing them for fear” (Luke 21.26a).

Most crucially of all, we hear not a mention of Almighty God in public debate – His genuine existence, and His roles as Creator, Sustainer, Saviour, Forgiver and ultimately as Judge. Not too many people now have an awareness of the Christian Faith, let alone any personal allegiance to Almighty God through His Son Jesus Christ. This is a situation in which the Church, “the body of Christ” and “the bride of Christ” (egs., I Corinthians 12.27 / Ephesians 5.23-27), must shoulder some of the blame. The Church is splintered into a thousand parts and

evidently has little power or success in its key tasks of proclaiming the Gospel and of saving souls. What of Jesus' own prayer, that all the Christ-believers should be one, as He and the Father are one, "that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17.21-23)?

As a result, too many of "those who mourn" now grope as to how to grieve. On this lockdown anniversary we have seen people lighting candles and holding daffodils, a thin comfort when compared with accepting the abundant blessings and comforts of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: "Come unto me, all ye that are heavy laden and I will give you rest ... Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted ... Whoever comes to me I will in no wise cast out ... being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ... For [there is] one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (from Matthew 11.28 & 5.4 / John 6.37b / Romans 5.1 / I Timothy 2.5 – to name but a few of God's promises in His Word). How often is this simple, glorious Gospel ever explained to needy people in their weeping and despair?

"Man does not live by bread alone", nor by vaccines, professors, social media, television, candles, demonstrations, or any other manmade invention, "but by every word of God" (Luke 4.4b, KJV). How the Gospel is needed, presented by Gospel-displayers and Gospel-explainers – people like us. The bad news has to come first, a task made easier these days when Man's efforts without God have so clearly failed and have brought God's beautiful but fallen world to its present dangerous state. We speak of the holy God, of our sinfulness, and of our helplessness if left on our own. And then we speak joyfully of the Good News! – of the victories of the cross and of the empty tomb; of Jesus Christ the Risen and still-Risen Lord; and of the call of God the Father with His gift of simple faith in the Person and Work and Blessings of His Son Jesus Christ for any who will respond.

In the conventional Christian calendar we come again now to Palm Sunday, Holy Week, Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday – the events at the heart of the Christian Gospel and Faith, and of all human existence itself.

"Ride on, ride on in majesty, In lowly pomp ride on to die ...". Praise God, Jesus did just that, which changes everything, for everyone. Not least it means that a candle lit and a daffodil held, when done in tearful thankfulness for all of God the Father's victories in Jesus Christ, expresses the ultimate truth and draws on the ultimate comfort.

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