

Shining like stars... in our community (1 Peter 3:13-18a)

Shining like stars (Simon Rea)
Sunday Morning 3 February 2008

1 Pe 3:13-18 STARS IN THE COMMUNITY

Earlier in the service we were singing one of my favourite songs. It's the one about about Our God being a great big God. Why is it one of my favourites? Because it's true: God is big and God is great. That's something the Bible tells us again and again and it's something our own hearts want to tell us, too.

Our God is a great big God. Oh yes and I like the tune, too... And waving my arms about. But that's another story.

It's so simple and it's so true. But I sometimes wonder if we realise just how big our God is? Sometimes we run the risk of taking our Great Big God for granted. Before we focus on how we can respond to the love that Great Big God has shown us in Jesus, by shining like stars in the community, we're going to spend a few minutes thinking about how big he really is. To help us with that, we're going to look at a few slides on the screen: **PPT 3-15**

The life cycle of a star lasts hundreds of millions of years. There are something like 100 billion stars in our galaxy and there are about 100 billion galaxies in the known universe and yet there are more interconnections between the neurons in our brains than there are stars in the universe. Remember those words from Psalm 8?

3 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
4 what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

Psalm 147 tells us:

4 God determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.

God, who made the stars and who made this world, God calls human beings, people like you and me to respond to him. Isn't that amazing? God calls us to respond to him. And there are so many ways we can do that: Today Katy and Gary have responded to him by bringing Riley for this service of thanksgiving. In November last year they responded to him by getting

confirmed here.

God who created the heavens and the earth constantly calls people to respond to him not just in these 4 walls but also in our families and in our place of work - paid or voluntary or whatever and also with the people who live around us, in our communities.

God calls people respond to him by calling us to be *his* people and by calling us to "shine like stars in his universe as and to hold out his word of truth". Over the past few weeks we've been looking at ways we can shine like stars at church, in our families, in our place of work and now this week we're going to focus on shining like stars in our communities. If we want to know how to do that, we'll need God's guidance and to find God's guiding we'll need to look into his word, the Bible. Ken is going to come and read a short passage to us now which will help us understand *why* we *should* shine like stars in our communities; *how* we *can* shine like stars in our communities and what *might happen* if we do shine like stars in our communities.

3 questions: **PPT 17**

Why should we shine like stars in our communities?

How can we shine like stars in our communities?

What might happen if we shine like stars in our communities?

You may want to keep your Bibles open at page 1219 as we go through them.

PPT 18 We're going to start with the first question because it's vital to know why we do something, otherwise we can just end up doing too much and burning out or feeling like we've fallen into a black hole. Why should we shine like stars in our communities? We're going to start with this question but the answer comes at the end of our reading. At the end of our reading, Peter writes this:

PPT 19 v18 Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

St Paul puts it like this in his letter to the church in Rome: "[But] God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died

for us" Ro 5:8.

Sin is whatever we allow to come between us and God - it's the minor crime against our own bodies of eating too much chocolate as the Cadburys' adverts may well soon be telling us in the run up to the secular celebration of bunnies and cream eggs. Sin is much worse than that, sin is whatever we say or do or don't say or don't do which stops us from living the full lives God wants us to live. Christians know that they are sinners - but we also know that the great big God we were singing about earlier, the one who created the stars we saw on the screen and the world we live in, we also know that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life Jn 3:16.

St John writes in his first letter:
[God]sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins 1 Jn 4:9-10

If you're a Christian, you'll know that

Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God v11.

If you're a Christian then you'll want to respond to the gift of new life God has given you through Jesus. If you're a Christian you'll want to respond to that gift by showing that new life in your everyday lives, not just for one hour on a Sunday morning. You'll want to respond to that glorious gift here in these 4 walls but more than that, you'll want to respond to that gift outside the church, too, in your family and in your community, too.

God has given each Christian such a wonderful gift: forgiveness of sin and new life through Jesus. That's *why* we should shine like stars - wherever we are!

How can we do that? How can we respond to that gift? One way is to do what our theme verse tells us to: shine like stars - wherever we are. But what does that mean? How can we shine like stars? **PPT 20**

In our reading, Peter suggests 4

different ways in verses 15-17 and we'll be looking at each of them in now. But I think you could sum them all up like this:

PPT 21 No God Show God

PPT 22 noW God Show God

PPT 23 KnoW God Show God

PPT 24 Know God? Show God?

If you know God, you're going to want to show God.

If you know God in your heart, you're going to want to show God in your life.

What does that mean in practice? **PPT 25** V14. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened."

Has anyone here ever watched the news on TV or on the radio or ever read a newspaper? Well if you've ever done any of those things, you'll know what I mean when I say, it's a big bad world out there: worldwide recession from the US, financial meltdown in Europe, global warming, environmental catastrophes everywhere, personal debts, mortgage repayments, youth violence and even ASBO grannies... There is so much to worry about - whether you're a Christian or not. The fears underneath all these

headlines are real, and that's why people talk about them so much, so how can Peter say "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened."? Christians recognise that the world is full of problems: we don't live in cloud cuckoo land and we don't wander around with rose tinted spectacles humming "Don't worry, be happy" under our breath... Christians can't do that because Jesus didn't do that. Jesus lived with us as one of us. He was a real human person just like you and me. Like us Jesus knew joy and he knew pain and he knew fear because Jesus knew joy, pain and fear God also knows and understands us in our joy, pain and fear because Jesus is God.

So how can we not fear what they fear and not be frightened? **PPT 26** V15 ... in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. That's what knowing God really means. In fact it's the only way human being can know God. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, on his kingdom, and "all the rest will be given unto you" On his way back to Jerusalem and knowing what would happen to him there, Jesus says this to his closest friends: Lk 12:22-34 ...do not worry about your life, what you will eat;

or about your body, what you will wear. 23 Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes... Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? 26 Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? ...do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. 30 For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well."

If Christians can honestly do those things, not worrying and seeking God's kingdom not trying to build our own, then, it will make a real impression on those around us, on our communities. If we know God in our hearts, we'll show him in our attitude to life. But there's more: if we know God in our hearts, we'll want not just to show him through what we think, we'll also want to show him through what we say: **PPT 27**

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

Not every Christian has the gift of the gab when it comes to talking about their faith, not every Christian is called to be an out and out evangelist. Some people, like Billy Graham and J John do have that gift. I know I don't have that gift but I also know - because the Bible tells me so, that I should be ready to tell people about what I believe when they ask me. And that's not because I wear my collar back to front and it's not because I'm a curate. I should be ready to tell people about the hope I have in Jesus because I am a Christian. And so should all other Christians, too. Telling people about our faith is not the same as battering them with the Bible, it's more like sharing a special secret which we know is just so wonderful. If you think about it about it like that, you might well find it easier to do, too. Peter also tells us *how* we should give those answers: **PPT 28** with gentleness and respect, because as we do so we are shining some of God's love into the lives of other people.

If we know God, if we really know God in our hearts, we're going to want to show God through our lives and through our

words. We'll want to do that as individuals of course, because God calls us as individual human beings but he doesn't call us only as individuals: **PPT 29** He also calls us as his church. So as a church we need to show him through our corporate life together. There are many ways we can do this, for example we heard earlier how we can give a gentle and respectful answer to the problem of loneliness in our town through the TLC initiative we heard about earlier in this service and there are many other ways we are holding out the word of life through different activities. If you feel God might be calling you to take up something, then please speak to Graham or me after the service. God calls us as a church and he also calls us as churches together in our town. Many of you will already have heard about the ways will hope to be doing this through **PPT 30** Hope 08 this year - if you'd like to know more about this, please speak to Sam or Graham or me at the end of the service. I heartily commend Hope 08 to everyone here today - no matter how old you are - in MerseyFest 2005 the oldest volunteer was 85! - No matter whether you think you have special skills or not, I'm sure

you'll be amazed at what your contribution could lead to as churches in this town, in this diocese, in this nation, join together to proclaim the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ in word and in deed as we put our faith into action.

But Peter also warns us that it will not all be plain sailing. **PPT 31** It can't be - if we are followers of Jesus, then we should not expect to be treated differently from our master. Ok, it's not very likely that we'll be crucified on a cross but some of the comments we may get might feel a bit like it.

PPT 32

If we do feel like that at any time, then we can remember the words of St Paul who wrote this from his prison cell that he could do everything through him who gives him strength.

Despite his situation, St Paul knew that he was on the winning team because as a follower of Jesus Christ, he knew that God would be with him at all times and in all places. As followers of Jesus Christ, we can know that, too. That's because the great big God we sang about earlier, the

great big God who made this world and the rest of the universe, promises through Jesus Christ to be with his followers to the end of the age, forever. When anyone knows that, surely they will want to show it in their lives wherever they are, at home, in church, at work and in the community. If you know Jesus, then it is my prayer that what you have heard today will help you want to show it in your life, too. If you don't know Jesus, then it is my prayer that you will want to find out more about him and come to him, to his love and his power, too

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Eph 3:20-21