

## THE SERMON for EPIPHANY 3 – January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2026.

Readings: Isaiah 9: 1-4; Psalm 27: 1-10; 1Corinthians 1: 10-18; Matthew 4: 12-25.

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?:

**the Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?** [Psalm 27:1]

“Love” has always been the primary theme in my life and especially in my life as a priest, the secondary themes have always been “Hope” and “Light”.

In our readings this morning we are reminded of the Light which brings and enables Hope.

Personally, I have found the last few weeks particularly challenging and found myself “Doom Scrolling” through news feeds, wondering what the latest disaster is going to be, and wondering how that will affect people I love and care about, many over the other side of the world.

At the moment, there seems to be a great deal of darkness. Darkness in the headlines, darkness in our communities, darkness that sometimes settles quietly in our own hearts. There is the darkness of fear, of division, of weariness. Many people are asking—out loud or in silence—*Where is the light? And is there any real reason to hope?*

Into that very question, today’s Scriptures speaks with clarity and courage.

The prophet Isaiah proclaims:

*“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.”*

Not **will** see – **Have** seen.

Isaiah is speaking to a people living under oppression, uncertainty, and loss. This is not poetic optimism spoken from a place of comfort. It is defiant hope spoken right in the middle of suffering. The light does not erase the darkness by pretending it isn’t real. Instead, God’s light **enters** the darkness and changes it from within.

Isaiah tells us that burdens are lifted, yokes are broken, and joy begins to grow again—not because circumstances magically improve, but because God is at work where despair once ruled. Hope, in Scripture, is never naïve. It is stubborn. It refuses to surrender the future to fear.

Psalm 27, which reads like the cry of the heart, echoes this confidence in deeply personal terms:

*“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?”*

Notice the psalmist does not say, “The Lord removes all danger.” Instead, God becomes light **in the presence** of danger.

Even when enemies surround, even when abandonment threatens, even when prayer feels desperate, the psalmist declares **trust**. This is hope that has learned how to breathe in hard places.

Many of us know what that feels like. We may believe in God, yet still feel afraid. We may trust God, yet still grieve. Scripture does not shame us for that. Instead, it reminds us that courage is not the absence of fear—it is choosing to seek God anyway.

*“Teach me your way, O Lord,”* the psalmist prays.

Hope begins there: in the honest turning of our hearts toward God.

Then Paul, writing to the church in Corinth, brings the light directly into the messiness of human relationships. Division, rivalry, polarization—these are not modern inventions. The Corinthian church was fractured, each group convinced it had the right answer, the right leader, the right identity.

Paul's response is striking. He does not offer a clever argument or a power play. He points to the cross.

*"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."*

To be a Christian is to be counter cultural. In a world obsessed with strength, winning, and being right, the cross shines a very different light. It exposes our pride. It levels our divisions. It reminds us that our hope is not in human wisdom or allegiance, but in self-giving love. The cross tells us that God's greatest victory looks like vulnerability—and that real unity begins when we stand on common ground at the foot of Jesus.

I will never forget friends who lived on an isolated stretch of Great Eastern Highway, between Southern Cross and Coolgardie, telling me of an incident that happened, which for me highlighted how very different our thinking as Christians is to the wider world view.

Along the highway, not far from the bottom of their drive, was one of those overnight camping stays. Pete went down regularly to clean the toilets and tidy up the rubbish which was frequently strewn around, and then to help out any of the travellers who had struck some trouble.

They regularly had backpackers from around the world staying with them, helping out on the property.

One time, one of the backpackers turned to Pete and asked him why he did this. "That isn't your property, you don't know these people, why do you put yourself out to help them?"

Many of us were stunned, why wouldn't you? It is the Aussie way – it is the Christian way to help others who have got into a spot of bother! But the lesson which came home to me was that it wasn't necessarily the way other cultures would have reacted. We help when we see a need, rather than do nothing.

We are called to be light, to be followers of **The Light**.

At the beginning of John's Gospel, in those profound opening verses we hear:

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. [John 1: 4-5]

In Matthew 5 we hear Jesus say:

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ...

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. [Matthew 5: 14 & 16]

Finally, in this morning's Gospel, that light takes on flesh and walks among the people.

Jesus begins his ministry not in the halls of power, but in Galilee—a place known for its diversity, its tensions, its distance from the center. Matthew intentionally connects this moment to Isaiah's promise:

*"The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light."*

Jesus does not merely talk about light. He **is** the light.

He calls fishermen, ordinary workers, people with rough hands and complicated lives. He proclaims repentance—not as condemnation, but as invitation. - *Turn around. There is another way to live.*

He heals the sick, restores the broken, and brings hope to those who had been pushed to the margins.

And notice this: the light spreads.

As Jesus moves, people follow. As he heals, hope multiplies. Light is not hoarded—it is shared. This is crucial for us today. We are not only people who *receive* hope; we are people called to **be** the Hope and **carry** it to others.

So what does this mean for us, here and now?

It means that when the world feels overwhelming, we remember: darkness does not get the final word.

It means that when fear tries to shrink our lives, we lean again on the God who is our light and salvation.

It means that when division threatens to define us, we return to the cross, where love is stronger than ego and grace is stronger than pride.

And it means that when we wonder whether one life can really make a difference, we look at Jesus walking along the shoreline, calling ordinary people—and we hear that call again.

Hope today may look small. It may look like kindness that refuses to harden, truth spoken gently, faith practiced quietly, justice pursued patiently. But Scripture assures us: light does not need to be loud to be powerful. Even the smallest flame changes the darkness.

During the week I came across the following:

Blessed are you who bear the light in unbearable times,  
who testify to its endurance amid the unendurable.  
who bear witness to its persistence when everything seems in shadow and grief.

Blessed are you in whom the light lives,  
in whom the brightness blazes – your heart a chapel,  
an altar where in the deepest night can be seen,  
the fire that shines forth in you –  
in unaccountable faith, in stubborn hope,  
in love that illumines every broken thing it finds.

Jan Richardson.

We have made the choice to follow Jesus, so, have faith, as the Psalmist says: “your face, Lord, I will seek” [Psalm 27:10b] for -

The light has dawned. Christ is among us.

And in him, hope is not only possible, it is already breaking in. Amen.

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