



# Invited

## LENT 2021

### Episode Three: Light

Welcome to week three of Invited, the midpoint of this first season. We continue to explore the foundations of what it means to be Catholic Christians this week by meditating on the mystery that is the death and resurrection of Jesus. And yes, you read that correctly – this is the first season! We will be creating new content every year for the next 5 years (until the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Diocese in 2025) exploring different themes as we focus on different times of the liturgical calendar.

Our guest speaker this week is David Beresford. David lives in Bognor Regis and runs the Catholic Bible School with his wife Sarah.

### Guest Speaker – David Beresford

Hello everybody, it's a real pleasure and a privilege to be able to share some thoughts with you as part of our diocesan mission. I really enjoyed the first two talks, and it is really good to be reminded in Dave Well's talk [Episode One] how much God loves us and the difference that makes in our lives - and his great line that "there's nothing we can do that will make God love us any more, and there is nothing we can do to make God love us any less". These are life changing words that we should really cling to.

Father Tom talked to us about sin last week - the nature of sin and the impact that it has, and the problems that it causes, and how we're all sinners. He used an expression that humanity is created to achieve goodness, yet too frequently we experience evil and we struggle to achieve our purpose.

But even though we sin, God's great love will make things right. Fr Thomas reminded us of the promise that God made in Genesis, that Eve's offspring, Jesus, would stamp on the serpent's head, the devil. That Jesus would be bruised, he would taste the pain of life on this fallen earth but in doing that, he would bring an end to evil and to sin.

That's what I want to talk about in these 15 minutes: How is it that Jesus saves us?

My name is David Beresford, my wife Sarah and I run the Catholic Bible school. Our work is about trying to help people grow in their faith by helping make sense of the Bible, because it's quite hard sometimes isn't it, to make sense of what the Bible teaches us - but the truth that is contained there is life changing.

In John's Gospel there is that stunning line, John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only son so that everyone who believes in Him, may not perish but have eternal life"

There is something profound there - that it's in believing in Jesus, that we have eternal life, eternal life that's the now and the forever in heaven. It's what we long for, that eternity with our loving father, that source of love that David spoke about in the first talk. An eternity with that, with God who is love. That's what I'm going for- that's what I'm living for - that's what I'm promised. And that's what brings me joy. That's the good news that I received, and I will try and share.

So how does it work? What is it that I believe in? Is it just believing that Jesus existed? No. Is it just believing in what Jesus taught? No. It's in believing in what Jesus did, who Jesus is. That's what saves us, and what did he do? - he died for us on the cross. Did we ask him to - no. Did we need him to - yes.

We couldn't sort this out ourselves, only God could sort this out.

But what is it that needs sorting out? Well, it's this problem between goodness and sin, between good and evil - they can't exist together.

We use many different analogies and ways of looking at how Jesus dying on the cross to save us. Hopefully all of them are helpful in their own ways, but sometimes it can get a little bit confusing.

It's important to say that it's not necessary to completely understand how Jesus dying on the cross, means that I can live forever with God in heaven.

I don't have to understand that completely. I just have to trust it. I have to believe it. I have to fall into it. That's our faith, but can we spend some time thinking and talking about it. Yes. Does that help our belief - yes, I think it does.

I suppose it's a little bit like this; God is pure goodness, is love in its fullest sense - we sometimes use an analogy of light - God is light, Jesus is the light - and when light enters a place of darkness, the darkness is removed.

You see, darkness is the absence of light, it's not a "thing" it's not a tangible thing. Darkness is the absence of light. When there is no light, that's when we have darkness.

And it's the same with sin.

Sin is that darkness. Sometimes it's an absence of God - when we don't recognise that we're loved, when we're don't fully appreciate how loved we are, and how loved everybody else is, then we sin.

We sometimes use candles in our churches, and our faith, as a reminder, a beautiful simple reminder of the light that is God. During the Easter triduum we have that moment of walking into the dark church with lit candles and the light removes the darkness.

But we need to think about the consequences of that. You see, when we die, we're going to encounter that light, we are going to be in the presence of light. And unfortunately our sin, that darkness is what covers us. Our soul is shrouded in that darkness, and so when we - in our darkness - encounter the light we will be destroyed. We cannot exist in the presence of light.

Darkness cannot exist in the presence of light, so that's a problem.

But it's not a problem that's beyond God. The problem is beyond us! I can't make that darkness disappear, I can try and try and try not to sin, but I stumble and fall - we all sin but any darkness is destroyed in the presence of light.

So something has to happen, and what has to happen is what does happen. Jesus on the cross takes on board, takes onto himself, all of our darkness, he takes it all. Every little bit of it.

And in doing so, he is extinguished. That light is removed, he takes every bit so that there's nothing left. And that's death. That consequence that would have been ours He takes on himself.

Our Gospel writers try and present this to us - Matthew, Mark, and Luke - we read those gospels - we find them talking about the agony and the suffering in that moment in that action and they talk particularly about the physical agony, which is just a glimpse really of what's going on, on the inside, of that light being covered in the darkness, slowly being extinguished.

In Mark's Gospel, we hear Jesus crying out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me". Jesus is right in the midst of that darkness, really suffering and the flip side of what's going on there is presented in John's Gospel.

It's the same story, the same moment. But John presents it differently, John presents the glory in that moment. John presents Jesus not being punished but Jesus taking all these things - from the moment, Jesus sends Judas, off to betray him in John's Gospel, Jesus is in control, right up to the last moment when looking and seeing everything is finished, He gives up, he breathes his last and gives up his spirit - Jesus is in control right to that moment. It's the most selfless, most powerful and profound act that has ever happened.

Why does God do it?

Why does God, pay the price of our sin. Is it because God needs us in heaven to worship him? Well, no, that's ridiculous - God doesn't need anyone, he doesn't need us to love him.

Why does God want us to love him?

Well, because that's what brings us life. We, God's children are most alive when we're in the presence of the light, when we are fed and loved. I know that I'm at my best when I'm loved. You will be at your best when you're loved. That's what God wants for us. That's why Jesus dies on the cross for us, because He loves us, because he knows this is going to be the best thing for us.

It's not, it's not about us. It's not about what we do. It's about what God does.

St Paul writes this in a letter to the Ephesians. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing". It's a gift of God, not the result of works. My being good, doesn't mean that I can spend eternity with God. I can't wipe out the darkness by just being good, I can't do it.

God can, and He has.

Back in the Gospel of John, Chapter Three, just before verse 16 "For God so loved the world" there's a line that says, "and just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so must the Son of Man be lifted up" and it reminds us of a crazy story of the Israelites in a field being bitten by poisonous snakes - when you're bitten by a snake you die because the poison is that virulent.

God deals with this by getting them to make a statue of a serpent and hold it on a pole and when you're bitten you look to the statue, and in looking you are saved. We read that story and think what? There's a magic, serpent, pole thing?

No, no, no, what we see when we read that story is faith, faith that God can overcome. The symbolism in the story is huge; the symbol of the serpent biting them, harks back to the early Genesis story of Adam and Eve in the garden. The serpent is the tempter that causes them to sin, and that sin leads to death, just like the poison of the serpent is deadly.

What they say here is when you look at the serpent you'll be saved. In John's Gospel, it says "so must the Son of Man be lifted up". Jesus on the cross, is that which we can look at to be saved.

It's not a magic statue that saves us. Our crucifixes in our churches aren't magical, mystical things, but they remind us of the one who was lifted up, they remind us of the one in whom we believe, they remind us of the action that God undertook to save us, they remind us of how much God loves us, that he takes on all that darkness, that symbol of the serpent, that symbol of sin.

Jesus takes that. Does he become a symbol of sin? No, no, but he holds it, because he's glorious, isn't he? He is love, but does it look like sin yes, does it look horrible? Yes, and it looks glorious because it's an action of love its self-sacrifice.

And so I have to just look - not look to the crucifix, but look to the one who's crucified, and believe and trust that He's done that for me. He's done that for me. If I was the only person who ever existed, He would do that for me. He died for you, to save you because he loves you.

That is the most amazing, good news! And I just have to believe that what he's done is enough.

But does that mean I can just keep on sinning. Well, in some ways, yes - and I can hear you almost shouting at me - 'what do you mean? Don't be ridiculous!'

But it does, because Jesus has paid the price for every sin that we've committed and every sin that we will commit, so we could keep sinning and Jesus has paid for those.

But will we? No, no, we won't, because when we look to what Jesus has done, when we recognise that we are forgiven. When we receive that love, that mercy and grace we won't keep sinning.

We'll sin occasionally, but we'll try harder not to and will receive more and more love - as I receive more and more love, I'm less likely to sin - that's the nature of it. It is not about us trying it's about us receiving.

So, I look around the world today. Does it look like a world that's been saved, was Jesus' action enough? It doesn't look like it does it sometimes, particularly in the darkness of our current situation in this pandemic. But if you look carefully you can see glimpses here and here and here and there and there and there, moments, glorious moments little specks of light. People sacrificing things, serving other people giving, giving, giving glimpses of the kingdom. That's what we're called to be, we're called to be that light. That light to shine in the darkness.

We're called to be the ones who lead others to that light. But do we do right in our own strength. No. How do we do it?

Tune in next week, and we'll explore the choice that God gives us - how are we going to respond?

Thank you for listening and may God bless us all.

## Personal Testimony – Jane Ashton

Interviewer: So Jane, welcome. Thank you so much for joining us and for giving us the time to tell us your story.

Q. We'll start with your early years, were you born and raised as a Catholic?

Yes, born a Catholic, and then always went to Catholic schools. Went to mass every Sunday and tried to carry that on as an adult. I guess, more recently, I found that the mass was very mysterious, and I felt quite disconnected from that and often had difficulty following the readings. My mind would easily wander elsewhere.

Q. I think we've all been there. But I understand that you went through - a period of searching, is that right?

I guess I found that there was something missing in my life. And then in more recent years I became more interested in in yoga and philosophy but didn't find that satisfying. Meanwhile, I was having a problem in my personal life and I wanted to

speak to someone about that. After having never spoken to anyone at Mass, I made the step and reached out and asked if I could speak to someone at the end.

I wanted to share what I was going through with someone of the same faith and they invited me to a rosary group, and then from there, they said that they were going to introduce the Alpha course later in the year - I was thinking 'okay this will probably help with my questioning.'

When the Alpha course came up I'd actually already booked on a yoga retreat, and I was on the yoga retreat and it really struck me - the contrast in the people, really - in that I felt such a warmth and welcome when I went to the first Alpha meeting - that helped me decide which way I wanted to go.

Q. And which parish was this?

The Holy Name in Esher.

Interviewer: Gold star for Esher parishioners there!

Q. So, when we were preparing you mentioned the fact that you felt like you'd come home, is that right?

I felt such a welcome, I just felt accepted for who I was and where I was. It felt like, well, gradually came to find that it's like an extended family.

Interviewer: That's such a fantastic way of describing it. Some people that I've interviewed for their testimonies have had really big epiphany moments where they have thought to themselves 'gosh yes, this whole God thing really make sense.'

Q. Did you find that or was it more of a gradual process for you?

No, it was a very gradual process for me. I guess I started to realise in one of the Alpha meetings - we were talking about how God loves you and I just couldn't understand that. I could understand how he could love other people, but I didn't feel it for myself. It wasn't until a few a few months later I guess - the personal problem I was having, I was really suffering with that - and during the darkest, *the darkest* night, I actually felt held in the palm of God's hand.

And still, despite that profound moment, it wasn't till afterwards that I started to accept that I was loved, but it was very gradual.

Q. And the people around helped you out, they gave you lots of tools and tips and books and all sorts of stuff, didn't they ?

Oh yeah, so many people that have helped along the way. And I guess it started with an email 'Thought for the Day' that appealed to me.

And then following that, again on one of the Alpha evenings, I was quite inspired by one of the younger members of the table. He said he was reading the Bible at night before he went to bed, and I thought 'well if he can do it then I can!' I found it harder with the book but found a Bible App with narration that really helped me.

So it happened that on one of the evenings the host shared her prayer app with me on the Ignatius way of praying - where you use reflective questionings - and I thought, 'well, I'll try this and retrain myself.'

Interviewer: I often think that prayer is a bit like a muscle, you have to build it up, don't you? You can't just jump straight in there and do the real heavyweight stuff, you have to build it up gradually. It's great that you've taken that time to find what works for you.

So, this episode is all about Jesus' redeeming love.

I'd say I came to know God the Father first and I found it difficult to approach Jesus because I felt that he was too perfect, and I was afraid to approach him. And so, a year ago, I spoke to a priest about this and he described to me that since we're baptised we are children of God - so we can actually see Jesus as our brother.

I started to think of it in that way, and then through Alpha, came to realise that Jesus was a real person. It wasn't until later last year, and during the lockdown, that I became aware of these 'take time' meditations through a local church which is a nice way of getting to know Jesus. Through that, you get to imagine yourself with Him. Again this is all really helping me.

Q. And so, I suppose, if you think about your life now that you're sort of starting to grow in relationship with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, how would you compare your life now to how it was before you started 'digging deeper' into the faith.

I'd say that I always believed but now I understand *why* I believe. I feel that veil has come down, or the veil has been lifted, should I say, and now life has more meaning. Before, I just went to mass on a Sunday and I found solace through that, but now I want to make prayers part of everyday - it's become the most important thing.

Interviewer: Fantastic. Fantastic, and that has inspired you to want to share that as well and to do things like this, that a slightly out of the ordinary, and get involved in your parish. I understand you're going to be going on a course soon, in your parish?

Yes. A formation course to deepen the faith.

And work out where God is calling you.

Yes, because I feel we can't do this on our own, you know, it helps to talk to others. And we need each other.

Interviewer: So we'll just finish. I apologise I went a bit off script there .... But we'll come back to the script.

Q. What advice would you give to someone who feels, perhaps, as you did, that you went to Mass on Sunday, but feel perhaps a little bit disconnected, particularly after lockdown. Maybe they haven't gone back to Mass, live streaming has been a bit distant, that kind of thing - what advice would you give to them?

I'd say just reach out to someone at church, like I did. It could be someone just at the back of the church on your way out, someone in the pew next to you or someone on the hospitality team or even directly to the priest.

There may be a group that you want to get involved in, a ministry or you may want to embark on, a course where you explore your faith. As I said, I don't believe we can do it on our own, but there are people out there that will help you.

Q. I'm going to go off script again, if you make that brave step to reach out is it worth it?

I was in a lonely place but so much has come from that initial leap of faith, as it were. I really felt it was a step I was making, but didn't know what was coming. I encourage people to do that if they are looking for something, if they feel they need something.

## Prayer



*Invited*  
LENT 2021

We come to you Father as your precious children knowing that  
you love us unconditionally.

We ask for your forgiveness for all the times we have not chosen  
to live in the light and thank you for the gift of the sacrament of  
reconciliation, where we can meet with you personally to be freed  
from our sin.

Be with us as we seek to spread your good news and reach out in  
love to all those around us.

## Reflection Questions

- I imagine Jesus is sitting here with me now. I tell him what I want to say to him. What do I hear Jesus saying to me in reply?
- Do I believe that what Jesus has done is Good News?
- Do I genuinely believe that Jesus has paid for my sins? That with his mercy and grace that I will receive more and more from God and that I will sin less?

During this past year it has been a difficult to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but it provides a great opportunity to personally meet with Our Lord's mercy in an intimate way. We hope the last question will inspire you to seek out the sacrament if you can, and to experience the joy of being united with the One who loves you. If you haven't been for a long time – do not be afraid – just tell the priest and he will guide you, with such joy in his heart, because a child was lost, and now they are found!

- What do I need to bring to Jesus in the sacrament of reconciliation?

## Conversation

Why not have a chat about how Lent is going for people before you dive straight into conversation - are people still managing to avoid the chocolate biscuits?

Maybe have a think about why we fast from things, reflect on the things we have been forced to fast from this last year (family/hugs/going out), can this help us gain a different perspective on fasting? Perhaps being forcibly denied some things has helped us to grow in other ways. Once you have explored these ideas, spend some time chatting about your responses to the film.

Was there anything that surprised you or challenged you?

How did you find the experience of 'Journaling with Jesus'? How easy is it to relate to him?

After spending a good amount of time reflecting and unpacking, it is time to prayerfully proclaim the Word of God:

## Ephesians 2:4-10

### You have been saved through grace

God loved us with so much love that he was generous with his mercy: when we were dead through our sins, he brought us to life with Christ – it is through grace that you have been saved – and raised us up with him and gave us a place with him in heaven, in Christ Jesus.

This was to show for all ages to come, through his goodness towards us in Christ Jesus, how infinitely rich he is in grace. Because it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith; not by anything of your own, but by a gift from God; not by anything that you have done, so that nobody can claim the credit. We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live it.

## Gospel John 3:14-21

### God sent his Son so that through him the world might be saved

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

'The Son of Man must be lifted up  
as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert,  
so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.  
Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son,  
so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost  
but may have eternal life.  
For God sent his Son into the world  
not to condemn the world,  
but so that through him the world might be saved.  
No one who believes in him will be condemned;  
but whoever refuses to believe is condemned already,  
because he has refused to believe in the name of God's only Son.  
On these grounds is sentence pronounced:  
that though the light has come into the world  
men have shown they prefer darkness to the light  
because their deeds were evil.  
And indeed, everybody who does wrong  
hates the light and avoids it,  
for fear his actions should be exposed;  
but the man who lives by the truth comes out into the light,  
so that it may be plainly seen that what he does is done in God.'

Allow some time to rest in God's Word, then share your responses to these passages. Everyone will respond differently, and that is beautiful – it is God speaking directly into their situation. Here are some questions that you can use to help the conversation if required.

- Spend a few moments to reflect on the following "*God loves you so much, that He gave His only Son for you*". How does this make you feel?
- "We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life" Do you find it hard to believe this? Why?
- "the light has come into the world" All darkness is destroyed in light. How do we /can we allow God's light into our lives?

Don't forget, we want to hear how you are getting on, so please do stay in touch with us by sending updates and/or photos to E: [invited@abdiocese.org.uk](mailto:invited@abdiocese.org.uk)

Please note, we may use photos for future publicity on our website, promotional materials and social channels, so only take pictures of people over 18 who give clear consent – thank you!

God bless,

The Diocesan Formation Team.