

## *Reader Jenifer Davison*

At the beginning of the year 2005, Bishop Tom Butler on Radio 4's 'Thought for the Day' referred to the famous painting called 'The Scream' and said that 2004 was the year of The Scream because of all the tragedies that had occurred in that year, and he mentioned Iraq, the middle East, Dafur, Boscastle and the Asian earthquake. And here we are 15 years on and most of those years could be called 'Years of the Scream'. There seems to be no end of the horrors that we encounter each year, and these events can test our faith in a loving and caring God – why does He allow such things as natural disasters to happen? The answer is that we don't know, and our faith in Him leads us to trust Him. It reminds me of poor old Job who had everything taken from him as well as being inflicted by a horrible skin disease, and his despairing wife said him, "Oh why don't you just curse God and die"! His reply was "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God and not receive the bad?" In spite of his suffering he did not lose his faith in God. And then there is Peter, at a time when many of Jesus' followers were deserting him, and he asked his disciples "Do you want to leave me also?" and Peter replied. "Lord, to whom should we go, you have the words of eternal life". A better question that we might ask than our previous one is "Does God care what happens to us?" And the answer is a resounding "Yes".

Thinking of our OT reading for today, where the people of Zebulun and Naphtali had forsaken God and turned to wizards and praying to the dead for help. Engulfed in gross spiritual darkness, perplexities and distresses and awaiting God's promised judgement for their sins, the prophet unexpectedly saw through the gloom. On the edge of the darkness a distant light, he heard God's message, 'Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress...the people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned'. God's merciful 'nevertheless' gives rise to hope.

In our world, the darkness of oppression, hunger, prejudices and all forms of hatred abound. Innocent blood is shed on our streets, and the blood of our

children is spilt without mercy where we use war to settle conflicts. The darkness and fear of terrorism, the disregard for life, and the indignity and contempt metered out to people made in the image of God, are indicators that ours is a dark world. Nevertheless, God's love, embodied in the Light that shone and dispelled the darkness in Galilee, still shines in our world today. For as St. John tells us in his Gospel, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life'. This is the amazing truth about God – this is the heart of the Gospel - God so loved the world, that He came down from heaven and lived amongst us, as one of us, sharing our sorrows, our pains our death. Taking our flesh upon Himself, He is forever united to us, He is forever one with us and continues to suffer with us.

The people of Galilee, walking in spiritual darkness, saw a great light, in the person of Jesus. St. John assures us that the darkness of this world has not overcome the light of Christ. So where then is the light today? It is in whatever and whoever promotes love, concern and compassion among mankind. In the worst of times and conditions, we see signs of hope, God gives a 'nevertheless' to cheer the drooping hearts of His people. Although at times the forecast for a world rebelling against God is grim, 'nevertheless' the light of God's grace brings healing and order into disorder.

Peter, Andrew, James and John were looking for a Messiah , someone who would lead them out of the darkness of oppression in their days, and in Jesus they saw that light, that hope and they left everything to become his followers, to shed light in a world of spiritual darkness, suffering, loss and pain.

Our light too must not be dimmed by the darkness of injustice, inequalities and hatred.

Jesus said, "You are the light of the world, so let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and praise your Father in heaven."