



**A Sermon by the Succentor, The Reverend Philippa White
on 12 November 2017**

Light in the darkness

Last year, I had the great privilege of walking with the St Barnabas Light up a Life torchlight procession. Many of you will have walked it, or seen it go past – one night in November every year. After a service at Our Lady of Lincoln people walk, on their own, in groups, in twos and threes, in the dark, down Cabourne Avenue and Nettleham Road to Lea Road and the playing fields there. And there everything changes. Great flaming torches are set on fire and start to blaze. People come together – no longer twos and threes, but a procession. The darkness becomes light.

And the procession moves from Lea Road to Nettleham Road, past the hospice where people stand at the windows to watch, along Church Lane to Newport Arch and all the way down Bailgate. People leave their dinners and come out of restaurants to line the street as the procession goes past. Hundreds of people, hundreds of blazing torches.

And as the procession reaches the West Front, the torches go out but the Christmas tree is lit. Light remains. And as the procession drops back again into groups and twos and threes, the light remains on the tree of light, just in front of the cathedral.

I've described the procession in a lot of detail because I want you to be able to picture it. I want you to have a picture in your head of a journey and of light – a journey in darkness, illuminated by blazing torches, and a bright, shining tree.

Tonight, at the end of the service, we'll have our own journey in darkness as we move into the crossing and place our candles on the cross, by the light of the setting sun. As it gets dark outside, our candles will burn – bright little sparks, driving back the darkness, if only briefly and if only for a little way. Like those bright and blazing torches, our little candles show us light, in all that that means...

each candle, each torch, standing for the light of the lives of people we loved and also the light of our love for them, still burning after their death, and the light of God's love, shining in the darkness, on those who have died and on those in the darkness of grief.

Our burning lights remind us that there is hope – that one day, darkness will become light. They remind us that Jesus is the Light of the World, the light shining in the darkness whom the darkness could not overcome.

Even when it feels as though the darkness is winning.
Even when we cannot see the light.

Our candles today, the torches in the procession, are reminders that even when we can't see it, there is light which the darkness cannot quench. Even when we can't feel it, there is hope that grief cannot erase. God's light shines in the darkness; God's light shines upon those who have died and upon those of us who mourn.

God's light isn't just for this life – God's light shines in eternity. God's light shines in the darkness of our lives; but in the fullness of eternity there is no darkness at all; in John Donne's words, neither darkness nor dazzling but one equal light.

In the bidding prayer for the traditional service of nine lessons and carols, we pray for all those who have died and we describe them as "those who rejoice with us, but upon another shore and in a greater light."

Our candles are a picture of God's light, shining into our darkness; but for those who have died there is no longer any darkness at all. Our candles are a picture of our love for those who have died, continuing beyond their death; and their love for us, their part in our community, continues. And as we gather in worship, we know that they gather in worship as well – their worship of God whom they now see clearly, whom we can only see as a bright light in the darkness. We remember All Souls, not just in remembrance of those who have died whom we love and miss, but in celebration that the community of God's people stretches through time – that those who have died, however long ago, are still part of God's people and part of our community. When we worship, they rejoice with us; and only sight prevents us from seeing them, one with us on another shore, and in a greater light.

We pray for them and for ourselves:

Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening into the house and gate of heaven,
to enter into that gate and dwell in that house, where there shall be
no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light;
no noise nor silence, but one equal music;
no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession;
no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity:
in the habitations of thy glory and dominion,
world without end. Amen.