

*A Message from Archbishop Anne to the Ecclesiastical
Province of Ontario*

December 2018



“You are the salt of the earth.....

You are the light of the world.....let your light shine before others”

(Matt. 5.13,14, 16)

Dear Friends in Christ,

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 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: 1-5

These evocative words from John will be read in churches around our province this Christmas. Families and friends and strangers will stand together in silence to listen to these words that proclaim the length and breadth and depth of God’s desire to love the world.

While the other Gospel writers tell an earthly story of a peasant couple, an infant, an innkeeper, shepherds and kings, John begins his story in the heavenly realm with God and God’s Word, reminding those who are listening that ultimately this is God’s world. No matter how dark it is outside there is a Light that wants to burst through the darkness and shine for all the world to see and the darkness will never overcome it.

The vision we are given in John’s gospel is not a vision for ourselves alone, something to hold onto, but a framework for us to be ‘the light of the world’ and to let that light ‘shine before others’. When Jesus spoke these words in his Sermon on the Mount the word ‘shine’ was the third imperative in it. The others were ‘rejoice’ and ‘be glad’ (Mt. 5.12).

In this season of joy and gladness we Christians are called to do what the Jews refer to as “Tikkun Olam” – the repair of the world. A 17th century midrashim (a story about a story in the Bible) explains it this way. In the beginning, it says, when the creator of the universe made the world, he set in place vessels into which he poured his divine light. But the light was too brilliant for the frail vessels which, unable to contain the light, shattered all over the universe. Ever since then, the myth continues, the task of human beings has been to go about God’s universe mending and transforming the broken vessels so that they can once again be receptacles of God’s divine light. But while everyone is called to repair the world, it is only the faithful who can do it, for it they alone know the purposes of the Creator. The vision of the Creator is that the whole earth will: *“Itself be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”* (Romans 8.21). Paul tells us that creation is eagerly awaiting this new time. How we get there is the ministry of all believers, and it embraces all people, all of creation.

In a world that is fragmented, alienated and polarised, in a world caught in a spiral of destruction through violence, wars and environmental disasters the need to repair the world is greater than ever before. But it can only be done by the faithful - you, me - who listen intently to the voice of God, and obey it.

As we anticipate the Word becoming flesh and living among us, and begin a new year, I invite you to join with me in being receptacles of God's divine light, making 'Tikkun Olam' our calling in 2019. Like everything else, the repair of the world takes place in tiny bite sized pieces and happens one person at a time.

Several years ago Colin and I were the recipients of some very difficult news. We left the hospital in Toronto and boarded the Go Train to return to our friends in Oakville. The news had left us virtually paralysed with fear and we sat opposite each other, crying unashamedly. I don't remember which stop it was that a woman leaving the train walked up to us and said, "I don't know what kind of hell you two are living through right now, but know that I will be praying for you." It wasn't a lot of light in that moment, but it was just enough to help us through that day. Tikkun Olam.

From the James Bay Coast in the northern part of our province to the southern most tip near Port Elgin people are living in all kinds of hell that we know nothing about. They are dealing with addictions and job losses, managing their depression and anxiety, living with illness, grief, and loss. Others feel marginalized because of their sexual orientation or the intergenerational effects of residential schools, while still others are homeless and unsure of where their next meal will come from. Some have lost their identity from being trafficked and many are in prison of every kind - there are thousands of people in need of repair within Ontario and plenty of brokenness beyond our borders.

With our feet firmly planted on earth let us practice 'Tikkun Olam' and be the light as we come alongside someone - even if it is for just a moment. A word of hope and encouragement, a smile or gentle touch, a prayer is God's language of love which will surely be enough to banish the darkness and let the Light of Christ enter. The pain and the loss will be no less real, but the fact that it is illuminated means that it can be transformed by the steadfast love of God.

The bishops of Ontario and the members of Provincial Council join me in wishing you and those you love a most blessed Christmas and New Year. In this season of a new church year we want to express our deepest thanks and appreciation for your sharing in the gospel of Jesus in your ministry within the walls of your home parish and beyond.

With warm wishes and blessings peace and joy,

+Anne: Algoma

+Colin, +Andrew, +Peter, +Kevin, +Jenny, +Ryscilla (Toronto), +John (Ottawa), +Linda (Huron), +Michael (Ontario), +Susan (Niagara), +Tom (Assisting Moosonee), +Michael (Assisting Ottawa)

*The Christmas spirit
Is that hope
Which tenaciously clings to the hearts of the faithful
And announces
In the face of any Herod the world can produce
And all the inn doors slammed in our faces
And all the dark nights of our souls
That with God all things are possible,
That even now unto us
A Child is born.
(Ann Weems)*



From our home to yours – blessings! +Anne and Colin – Sault Ste. Marie