

## Transforming Lives

Preachers Commissioning, 16 January 2008

### Wakefield Cathedral

In the enforced gloom of this otherwise marvellous building, the image of light erupting into darkness may be a good place to start. It was towards the end of the nineteenth century that Thomas Edison invented the electric incandescent lamp. That grand phrase, of course, simply describes the tungsten filament lamp that we have bought in their dozens over the years to light our houses.

Now we take them for granted but there is a wonderful contemporary description that shows what a remarkable revolution this was.

‘Everyone watched in awe as the fragile filament spread its lustre while resisting an amount of heat that would have melted threads of platinum.

‘It burned like an evening star for 45 hours,’ said Edison. A new light had been born, a light that was gentle and mild yet bright as day itself. Many people did not believe the reports and a public demonstration was arranged.

On New Year’s Eve, hundreds of visitors were conveyed to Menlo Park by special trains. The city fathers and leading scientists and industrialists had received an invitation from Edison to join him in a New Year party.

When the guests arrived, there was an annoying darkness, but all of a sudden hundreds of lights shone forth...a sight so brilliant and fairy-like that it was termed ‘a heavenly spectacle’ by the Press.’

Of course, this is hardly the moment to celebrate incandescent bulbs. The government is removing them from supermarket shelves, despite fears about mercury in the newer fluorescent lamps. But – and without getting too technical – and I’m not capable of that – these two types of lamps may help us this evening. The old bulbs we’re used to are really like tiny electric fires.

The filament heats up and glows white. The bulb casts light by radiating it to us. Fluorescent tubes and energy saving bulbs are different. There the electric leaps down the tube, and gives a discharge. The tubes are painted with fluorescent powder and the discharge makes them light up. So here the electricity affects the surface it touches.

This is just what *Transforming Lives* is about. We hope, in the next two years, that prayer, worship, the eucharist, learning and enjoying each other’s company will transform our lives. We shall be electrified by God’s Spirit. But we shall not just glow ourselves like incandescent lamps, we shall, through the lives we live, through the electricity of God’s Spirit transform others’ lives too.

The lives of those we touch will also be lit up at the touch of God’s Spirit in us. That stunning reading we heard captures it perfectly.

‘For we do not proclaim ourselves, we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord.’

If this happens our lives will be transformed, and *transforming* for others in ways we shall probably never realise. For it will be God working through us. ‘The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’ will touch others through us.

Some years ago now, Donald Nicholl wrote a marvellous book simply called *Wholeness*. In it he describes an engaging Indian believer, who was utterly transformed by holiness, by love of God. He died and before dying had asked to be left in a cave where he had regularly prayed. A month after – the time he'd allowed – his friends came to bury him. All they found was some hair and fingernails.

It was as if his holiness had transported him entirely to God's Spirit. He was totally transformed. So, let us offer ourselves to God. Let us offer ourselves to live as Jesus did. I leave you with St Paul:

‘And all of us with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.’

Amen – and may the Lord come and so transform us!

Reading: 2 Corinthians 3.18 – 4.6