

Light of The World - Some thoughts from Philip Everitt

In this dark and difficult time, I am reminded of why Holman Hunt's 'The Light of the World' is one of my favourite paintings. It is one of his most famous allegorical paintings. Hunt was inspired by the biblical verse "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and sup with him and he with me" (Revelations 3:20).

The painting shows Christ carrying a lantern and apparently preparing to knock on an overgrown and long unopened door. It is a beautifully painted image, and one which I have found over the years, both inspiring and comforting. Like most of his work, the painting contains many symbols and when these were explained to me (they are well documented), I saw the painting in a completely new light (excuse the pun) and it gave me a much deeper understanding of that particular verse.



There are three specific symbols that I find most significant. Firstly, his facial expression is one of patience and calmness waiting for the door to be opened. Not only that but wherever you stand to look at the painting, his eyes seem to be looking straight back at you making it very personal.

Secondly, The door which is meant to represent the door to our lives has no handle. Jesus is standing, knocking on the door and waiting patiently for us to open the door. It can only be opened from the inside because it is up to us to let him into our lives.



Finally, and perhaps most crucially, all the light in the painting comes from the lantern held by Jesus. “I am the Light of the World” he declares (John 8:14). As the Light of the World, Jesus gives life, just as the Sun gives life to the world. He also leads his followers through the dark and difficult times of our lives, providing guidance and hope.

Now, whenever I look at the painting and study each detail, I am reminded of Christ’s promise and my commitment to Him. Hunt painted three very slightly different versions, the largest and most famous hangs in St. Pauls Cathedral. Another version is in the Manchester Art Gallery. Imagine my delight, however, to find that the third version hangs in the Chapel of Keble College, Oxford, where my eldest son is the College Chaplain. Whenever, we go to see the family in Oxford, I always manage to fit in a viewing and always return uplifted.

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