

23<sup>rd</sup> February 2022

## Candles

**"He who receives an idea from me,  
receives instruction himself without lessening mine;  
as he who lights his taper at mine,  
receives light without darkening me."**

*Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Isaac McPherson (1813)*

In the early hours of the recent "Storm Dudley", there was a power-cut on Islay. I'd just switched on the standard lamp beside me so I could finish my book in the fading light, when we lost all power. I checked what was happening round about, and when I discovered that there were no lights shining from the surrounding properties, I accepted that it was a power-cut, affecting most, if not all, of the island.

The house I'm living in is all-electric and has oil-fired central heating. I had a casserole prepared for an evening meal. So that wasn't going to happen. There's an open fire here, but there was no available fuel. So that wasn't going to happen either. So it looked like it was tinned tuna, tomatoes and cold beans for dinner, duvets to be wrapped around for warmth, the prospect of bed at a very early hour – and candles!

I don't care much for a plethora of tea-lights and the ubiquitous scented candles. Utility candles are OK, and, thankfully, there were plenty of those. So, locating them in the fading light, setting them in strategic positions and settling down for a candle-lit evening, was the methodology for coping with an Islay power-outage. Candles were essential!

As I watched the flickering light of my candles, my mind wandered to evening worship in a candle-lit Iona Abbey. I recalled lighting numerous candles in cathedrals and churches, at home and aboard, as prayers for loved ones. I remembered candle-lit vigils for peace and reconciliation. I pictured Advent and Easter candles in churches I'd worked in. And I was reminded of the mantra, "Don't curse the darkness; light a candle", as an inspiration for hope and justice in the dark places of our world.

And I read again, by candlelight this time, Thomas Jefferson's inspiring words quoted above, resolving once more to go on lighting candles of ideas and instruction, of love and commitment, long after candles were needed to cope with a power-cut on Islay.

### A prayer for today

*Lord, see this little light of mine? It's a candle, set on a lampstand, just as you asked. Amen*