

Christmas Day Sermon

Liverpool Cathedral - Christmas Day 2014



And the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Christians have been reflecting on these words ever since they were written. Here's one reflection, from Wales:

And God held in his hand
a small globe. Look, he said,
the son looked. Far off,
as through water, he saw
a scorched land of fierce
colour. The light burned
there: crusted buildings
cast their shadows; a bright
serpent, a river
uncoiled itself, radiant
with slime.
On a bare
hill a bare tree saddened
the sky. Many people
held out their thin arms
to it, as though waiting
for a vanished April
to return to its crossed
boughs. The son watched
them. Let me go there, he said.

The Christian message is that God loves you. God loves you. God's love is not some spiritual, milk-and-water thing. God loves you. It's as if he gets your photo out - yours, yours - and says to the Angels "that's MY son; that's MY daughter". His voice bursts with pride as he looks at you as you are, and at what you can become.

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How do we know that? How do we know God isn't some fierce old thing instead, some bean-counter totting up your good & evil deeds and working out how hard to kick you? How do we know God isn't like Santa in the song where it says "He's making a list, he's checking it twice"? We know because of Christmas. Let me go there, he said.

I drove up Duke Street a few days ago and I drove past Colquitt Street where the blue Police tapes sealed off the road where Neil Doyle was fatally beaten, a young woman police officer was guarding the scene, where vengeance and anger broke out and where evil lifted its ugly head and laughed, a scorched land of fierce colour, crusted buildings cast their shadows. Evil and pain are real and can't be wrapped up in Christmas paper, a bare tree saddened the sky. Neil worshipped at the parish church, his wife is one of the treasurers there, they were just about to go on honeymoon, the cross is real, this beautiful world is marred by anger and violence, it needs to be redeemed, let me go there, he said.

Violence and anger, and hunger too, across this city and region people are working, and choosing, will I feed my kids or will I keep them warm, I can't afford to do both, people held out their thin arms in the sad sky, the foodbanks are open, the election is coming, the blame game is swirling around, the son looked.

And in the midst of all this pain, and more will come, and not forgetting the pain but remembering the love, we meet today, meeting to remember the love of the son of God, let me go there, he said. Let me go there, not to a palace but to a poor stable, let me stand with them, let me go to that hill with them, let me feed them with my word and with my life, let me nourish their thin arms, let me give them hope in their waiting, let me die for them, I love them so.

Jesus stands in Colquitt Street with that young woman officer, Jesus sits with Sarah Doyle and her family, he sits with those families in Peshawar and in Australia, Jesus sits with you and your family, Jesus stood in Hillsborough among the crowd. Jesus sits beside you at your Christmas table, and God held in his hand a small globe, almost like a hazelnut, you might marvel that it would exist, it is so small. And because of Christmas we say that it lasts and it ever shall last because God loves it. God shows it

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to the angels, he says, that's MY world, I will make it new, I will redeem it, I love it so.

The journey of our God is the journey here of the Holly Bough as we sang it last Sunday, a journey from crib to cross and then through the cross to life unending, and all that journey begins today, at Christmas, it begins at the crib, in poverty.

The word became flesh and dwelt among us, pitched his tent among us, came among us on the level ground, stood with us, not above us, the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only son of the Father, crying and snivelling and gurgling in poverty, all wrapped up in a poor manger,

The baby cries, among the smells of the stable, the baby cries and gurgles, the baby lives among the poor, because of love for you. It is for you that he came, it is for you that he longs, he loves you so. He longs that you should hold him in your arms as those shepherds did, hold in your arms the one who made you and all the stars, hold out your thin arms for him, he who became helpless for you, let me go there, he said.

And for two thousand years we have been reflecting on this, our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man, and today we reflect on it again as we come to Communion at Christmas, that God was man in Palestine and lives today in bread and wine. We the revolutionary people, who if we're in Christ love and love and never stop loving the stranger and the outcast and the poor and the despised, who go out onto the streets in this city and in this nation, who stand with Sarah Doyle and her family, and with the Hillsborough families, we stand against all violence and blaming, and we stand with those who use our foodbanks and with those who are desperate, we stand with them, in the name of the one who loved us, because he asked to come among us, and to save us and to know us and to call us to know God forever, and so we stand too with that Welsh vicar who also thought about this in the last century and who wrote this down:

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December 2014