

Reflection from Revd Ali for the Second Sunday before Lent.

This week's reflection is a little different. Usually I would share the 'script' of what I am going to preach during the recorded service of Holy Communion. This week we have a special guest preacher and I have not been able to acquire a transcript of their sermon. So, I thought I would share a few thoughts about the Gospel reading instead.

This week's Gospel (John 1: 1 – 14) is, I suspect, one of the most famous passages in the Bible. The beautiful, poetic language of St John contains so much, it could almost be the source for a whole sermon series. It is full of wonderful imagery of the creation and God's promise to God's creation. It is one of those passages that we hear every Christmas and sometimes, in its familiarity, the depth of it is lost on us.

It starts, literally, at the very beginning. The beginning of all creation. The moment of the big bang. The moment when God initiated all that is seen and unseen. An incredible and mind-blowing concept that is hard to get our heads around. I sometimes use a technique of sharing sacred stories and liturgy called Godly Play. The creation story in Godly Play begins something like 'in the beginning, in the beginning there was nothing, except perhaps for a great big smile'. That simple language trying to encompass the enormity of what happened at the dawn of creation. Trying to express the wonder of the presence of the Trinity before anything else. Maker, Word and Wisdom. Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, we express the wonder of the Trinity, God in three persons, was there in the beginning.

St John then focusses in on the Word. The Word of God that is Godself expressed in Jesus Christ. 'In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind' (verse 4). Jesus the source of our very being, was with God at the beginning of all time. Jesus, Godself incarnate as a baby over 2000 years ago who came into the world to be the new covenant between humanity and Godself. To change the relationship between God and us. To offer us a new way of being, a new way of life. 'The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it' (v 5). The eternal promise of God, that darkness will never win. The sun will always rise and God will always be with us.

John the Baptist points us towards Godself in the person of Jesus Christ. His job was to tell the people of God, and us, that God had broken into human history in the shape of the fully human yet fully divine Jesus. 'He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe.' (v 7) John was the signpost. He was the one who told the people how to prepare to come close to the kingdom of God, incarnate on the earth.

But 'He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him' (v11). St John reminds us of the sad truth, that despite God being in the world in the person of Jesus, the world did not recognise and accept him as Godself. His own people did not accept him. King Herod tried to kill him as an infant; leading to his family fleeing to Egypt as refugees. The opposition from the religious authorities, the Pharisees and the Sadducees led to his crucifixion on Good Friday. 'His own people did not accept him'. The unwelcomed Christ.

But Jesus was welcomed into his human family. His mother Mary said yes to God and nurtured the Son of God. Joseph welcomed him, despite knowing that Jesus wasn't his natural son. He was welcomed into a loving, ordinary home. His natal visitors welcomed Jesus. The shepherds, men with little or no social status welcomed Jesus. He was welcomed by his disciples. Those people whose lives were turned upside down by their encounter with the incarnate God. He was welcomed by the ones whose illnesses he cured. He was welcomed by those whose chains he broke. He was welcomed by those whose injustices he challenged, whose poverty of spirit he alleviated.

The ones who should have recognised him, the priests and the religious people should have known and welcomed him but they did not. It is the lowly, the poor in spirit and the marginalised who recognise and welcome Jesus for who he truly is. Jesus made God, in all God's omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence, known in the world in a way that humanity could and should have understood. But the religiosity and arrogance of some denied the truth of the revelation and led to the destruction of God revealed in human form.

Godself meets us in our humility. Godself meets us in poverty of spirit. Godself meets us in our doubt and our pain. Godself meets us just where we are, but we have to be prepared to welcome him into our lives. To allow the transformational love of God to change us to people who believe in his name. People to whom 'he gave the right to become children of God'.(v12) People who believe and share the truth that 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us'.(v14) So, let us all use the time we have left here on this glorious blue-green planet to share the great Good News of the truth of the life, death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. God with us, Immanuel. Amen.

If you would like an easy way of exploring faith further, then you might want to think about joining me for our Lent Pilgrim course which starts on Monday 21st February at either 10am or 7pm. Just give me a call or drop me a line if you would like any further details or to reserve a place.