

## 2<sup>nd</sup> before Lent 2009

*John 1.1-14*

### ***John's Poem***

Today is the second Sunday before Lent, so you might have been a bit surprised this morning to hear the Christmas Gospel read once again – we last heard it at the Christmas Midnight Eucharist. Probably the intention of those who set the three-year cycle of readings most churches use, was to make a connection between the first reading this morning, in which the book of proverbs speaks of Wisdom as the first-born of all God's creation, and St John's wonderful poem about the coming of the Son of God in the flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord.

To tease that out this morning would, I suspect, get us all into some rather heavy and sleep-inducing theology. But there is another way we can go with the gospel reading this morning; a way that speaks of the Mission of God, which might help us as we try in our parish life to become more oriented to Mission in what we do. We are trying to find God's vision for us here, a missionary vision to fulfil his will for us.

### ***The Mission of God***

So then, what does this marvellous poem of the incarnation at the hand of St John offer us? First of all, St John starts with how things are in eternity. These are his familiar words:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.*

A lot of people are puzzled by this: what does St John mean by 'the Word'? Well, he borrows the concept from Greek and Jewish philosophy, where it means something like the action of God. But St John uses it more specifically; he clearly has in mind our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Later in his poem he will say this clearly:

*And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.*

St John wrote those words perhaps sixty years after the life of Jesus. He wrote his gospel as a testimony for whatever church he belonged to – we no longer know.

So then, we learn something of the mission of God himself. The Son of God exists in eternity, from the beginning, with God, and was God. The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ as the word-made-flesh in time and history was a sending of the Son of God from the eternity of heaven into our world, into our life. If you want to think of it this way, our Lord Jesus Christ by coming to share our life, the human condition, everything that we are, was a sending out, a mission, of God himself to us.

Now that is all rather abstract, dry theology. What's really important for us? A little later in his Gospel, St John expresses this mission of God in a way that's a bit easier. I'm sure you know this famous verse – it's John 3.16

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.*

And that's the mission of God in a nutshell. God reaching out to us in his Son, sharing all that we are, and redeeming it. Through the Cross, through the forgiveness of sins that flows from it, through the his rising from the dead to open the way to heaven for us, through the gift of his body and blood in Holy Communion on that first Maundy Thursday to give us that spiritual food as a foretaste of heaven and to sustain us in this earthly life – through his sending of the Holy Spirit to inspire and guide and lead his Church on earth. All these things are tied in the mission of God, all these things flow from God's decision from eternity to send forth his Word, to make his word flesh in his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

### ***An Act of Love***

One thing strikes me about this. God did not have to do this – to send his Son to suffer and to die for us, to make a way of forgiveness and reconciliation, a way for us, his wayward children, to come back into union with Him. God does not need us – God indeed does not even need his creation. God is self-sufficient, and could have stayed as He was, stayed in that comfortable self-sufficient existence. But he chose to risk his very life with us in sending Jesus on his saving mission to mankind. Why? It can only be because God is love, and loves us, and desires us. And loves his whole creation too, for the calling into being of creation was an act of love by God in the first place. A lover, one who loves, must have something, someone to love!

So God did not stay in his own comfort zone, but chose to send his Son on the path to the Cross of Calvary, and the glory of Resurrection Day. It was to be a path of suffering, but also victory. It was to be a costly path, which would lead this Son of God to the depths of every human suffering that we know. For Jesus cried out in the garden of Gethsemane after the Last Supper and the day before he was crucified *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

That cry of the heart was from the heart of every human being who has ever known pain, sorrow, suffering. It was for *us*. That cry of our Lord Jesus Christ comes out of the love of God for us.

### ***Mission and the Comfort Zone***

So the Mission of God from all eternity has been about coming out of his comfort zone, because he is love, and loves us. What do we learn from this?

His Church, our Church, is now called to be part of this Mission of God. To love with that same costly love that was in Jesus. To hear God's call to us to come out of that 'comfort zone', that cocoon of security. To journey with Jesus, to find out what our Lord wants of us. Our Vision Day began the journey. Our developing Mission Plan will continue it. We will find costly, like Jesus did, and we may well find it uncomfortable, as Jesus did. In the end, we are called to be faithful in the Mission of God to those who do not know him, and that may take us to unfamiliar places. It's all about being faithful to God's Mission. Please pray about it, seek the vision of God for this place, pray for the success of the Mission of God here. Pray every day, for we must surround all we do with our constant prayer for God's guidance.

For God so loved the world..... and so must we.

*Revd Stephen Gough*