

Year C Second Sunday after Christmas John 1 1-18

The heart of God...This passage truly tells us a lot about the heart of God. All of Scripture tells us about God's heart although, as you know, we must be careful with Scripture – it can be confusing, misleading, misinterpreted, abused for our own personal gain – but it does show us the heart of God. In beautiful, poetic language John describes for us our God who loves us. Just how much God loves us is mind-blowing, awe-inspiring, and humbling when you take the time to crack open this passage and really dive into it...so that's exactly what we're going to do.

“In the beginning,” John writes. “In the beginning was the Word” and we are suddenly transported back in time, back to the creation of our world, back to a formless void and swirling, deep, dark waters. We are whisked away from the quaint and cozy stable in Bethlehem and plunged into the primeval history that fascinates scientists and intrigues us with its mysterious vastness. This God who comes to us, John reminds us, this God is and always has been. This God is powerful enough to speak our world into existence. This God is beyond our comprehension, beyond our time and beyond place. This God comes to us.

You have likely heard the saying, “God is love.” Well, God is nothing but love – pure, selfless, uncorrupt love. God speaks in love and creates in love and came to us in love to teach us how to love: to love God and to love neighbour, to live in perfect love with each other and with the rest of creation so that we, too, could experience true joy and peace. This is what life is meant to be. This God, who is life, who created all life, comes to give us that true life intended for us all along.

And God – the Word – became flesh and lived among us. That word, “lived”, literally means “pitched his tent”. God pitched his tent among us. The all-powerful

creator of all things, desires to be close to us. Of course, saying that God pitched his tent among us will remind everyone familiar with the Hebrew stories that, after the Exodus from Egypt, God dwelled in a tent with the Israelites in the wilderness – and even in the Promised Land – until King Solomon finally built God a temple. Perhaps you're noticing that you can't get too far into talking about God's plan for salvation before the Exodus story pops up. The Exodus story is a pivotal hinge in our story. It tells us that when God comes to us, God comes to rescue, to save, to give us wholeness of life in *his* kingdom that we won't find in the kingdoms of the world.

God doesn't just plan to rescue and heal all of us. The plan includes creation as well. The Word becomes "flesh", John declares. Flesh – not man. This opens our perspective up to the interconnectedness of life, not just humanity. We refer to fruits and vegetables as having flesh, for example. It is a good reminder that the God who made all things, desires to save all things. For God so loved the world that he sent his Son in the flesh to give us life. Even those of us hooked into the world of digital communication know that some messages are best delivered in person: a marriage proposal, the death of a loved one, a new baby going to be born. An email or text message just wouldn't seem enough for many of us.

This plan to come in person – in the flesh – is a daring plan, says Barbara Brown Taylor. She imagines God presenting this plan to the angels, to redeem all of creation through the birth of a child, as a plan that the angels *know* does not have adequate safety features. "Why not at least create yourself as a magical baby with special powers?" the angels advise. But God knew he needed to be a regular baby, living a life just like any human. There was a risk. Okay, there was a high risk, but

that was part of what he wanted his creatures to know: that he was willing to risk everything to get close to them, in hopes that they might love him again.

In this daring plan, without adequate safety features, we begin to see and understand the heart of God. It is a heart that will stop at nothing to rescue us, to make us whole. The rest of John's Gospel unfolds in more detail what is laid out in this beautiful beginning passage. John shows us, through his story of Jesus, how we get life, how we lose it, and how we are found by life – by God – again. "The thief comes only to kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly," is what Jesus will say later in John's Gospel (10.10). It offers us a way of knowing whether or not what we think and say and do is of God or not. If it is life-giving and promotes the flourishing of all creation, it is of God. If it is damaging or leading to division, it is not. We are able to know the difference because God allows us to know. We have been drawn into the cosmic love story of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – as they exist as togetherness, community, relationship, as love. As believers we, John assures us, are children of God, born of God, receiving God's grace. God, the Son, has made God known to us.

John writes of the intimate, loving relationship of God – Jesus is close to the Father's heart, he says. The original Greek tells us that Jesus is in the Father's bosom – lying on his chest, in other words. We hear this very same thing near the end of Jesus' life. His disciple – the disciple whom he loves is reclining upon Jesus' chest at the last supper (13.23). The same intimacy shared by God is shared between us and God.

This is both a comfort and a challenge to us. The story John tells today is heartbreaking. The life of the world came to the world, dwelled among his people

and the world did not know him. His people did not accept him. Yet no matter what the world does to him – no matter how hurtful, how horrible – the response of the heart of God, the response of the Word made flesh is always glory, grace, love, and life. Bob Pierce, the founder of World Vision, says: “Let our hearts be broken by the things that break the heart of God.” The Son makes known the heart of God to us and we are to make God known to the world. It is a world that doesn’t know him. There are people who will not accept us. But no matter what the world does, we are to respond with God’s glory, grace, love, and life. We shine the light of God’s love in the world because God’s love is the only way to mend the world.

There are a lot of things in the world that are breaking God’s heart. When Bob Pierce says that we must let these things break our hearts, too, what he means is that we must notice them, actually care about them, and then do something about them. Love God. Love neighbour. Love is an action. Love speaks. Love cannot keep silent and love cannot do nothing. We collect food, make meals, donate gifts, give away money but we must always do more and greater things with God until hunger is abolished, poverty is eradicated, equality is established. That’s a lifetime of work but God has given us the life to do it. Our God who is love showed us his boundless cosmic love for us in the baby Jesus, the Christ. God showed us his heart. Let us show his heart to the world.