

Year B: Christmas Eve Is 9:2-7; Ps 96; Titus 2:11-14; Lk 2:1-20
St. Barnabas, Florissant – December 24, 2020

Focus Sentence: God becomes human to bridge the unbridgeable gap.

I offer these thoughts in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Our human story starts at the very beginning of Scripture, when, at a word from the Creator, a pile of dust comes to life. Lifeless dirt is reconfigured into something alive and breathing and made in the very image and likeness of God. This human creature is moved from dust to dominion and is given the sacred power that no beast or angel or other creature possesses: the power to name, the power to choose, the power (ultimately) to reciprocate the love that gave humanity being. The power to say “yes” to God unlike the capacity of any other being --- not out of instinct, but out of free will. The power of response.

So bringing forth “Adam” and “Eve” was God’s calculated risk, God’s roll of the cosmic dice, so to speak. While the dynamic relationship between the Persons of the Trinity remained unchangeably bound in love --- always active, triumphant and endlessly enriching and creating --- the bringing forth of “Adam” posed a totally different dynamic.

PAUSE

Of course, we all know the rest of the story, the same sad story. Paradise lost. Perfect union gives way to disunion. Trust turns into mistrust. The triumph of love gives way to the tragedy of separation. Adam and Eve, using that precious gift of free will that God has given them, get too big for the britches they aren’t wearing.

And then, the Bible tells us, a cosmic catastrophe ensues. A chasm between Lover and beloved takes place and grows wider than the Grand Canyon. From time to time, over millennia, the beloved tries to reach over the chasm --- through the Law and the prophets and the sages --- but the outreach doesn't ever last long. Most of the time, the yearning for reunion lies as dormant as a winter animal. Human beings can't get enough of what they don't want: alienation and disrupted existence. Like a person dying of thirst who craves salt, humanity continues to choose rebellion over reunion.

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Yet God never gives up. Love never ends. In the supreme picture of God's undying love for the beloved, God self-surrenders. In an unprecedented and unrepeatable act, God crosses the chasm. God takes the ultimate risk. Like a parent going to any length to make a sick child well, the Unlimited becomes limited. The Boundless becomes bound. The Nameless becomes named. The Unknowable becomes known. "Glory to God in the highest" becomes "Glory to God in the lowest."

There, in a dark cave, in an obscure Judean village, to a peasant couple on a day we don't really know, God spoke God's Word again. Whereas the calling forth of "Adam" had been the most risky utterance God had ever made, the revealing of Jesus was God's most beautiful. The "Second Adam" had come: the Firstborn of the New Creation.

In Jesus Christ the chasm has been crossed. The new eon of creation --- which can't become old, and which is NOT subject to sin and death --- has come in Christ Jesus. The unending, unmerited love of God is shown forth in this person of Jesus --- the enfleshment of God. Where sin and alienation abounded, now grace abounds all the more in this New Creation. Jesus is God's ultimate vulnerability, the ultimate outreach to heal a sick creation. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life --- our bridge over that unbridgeable chasm. The way to know God as a friend and not an enemy. The way to know God as close and true and forever faithful. The way to heal our collective alienation --- with God, ourselves, and one another.

That, sisters and brothers, is what we celebrate tonight. The words of Isaiah are come true: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” We once were blind but now we see.

The verses from the letter to Titus which we heard read tonight sum up the message of this Christmas celebration: “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all.” (2:11) And the letter goes on to tell us exactly how we should respond to this gracious gift from God in Christ Jesus: We are to renounce all thought and action that isn’t consistent with the way Jesus lived on earth. And as Christ gave himself for us, so we now give ourselves to him in a life of righteousness. Finally, like the shepherds, we should go out and tell others about having received this Good News.

So, my friends, rejoice in this wonderful night, and have the merriest and most blessed Christmas ever!

AMEN.