

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



The Church's prayer for this Sunday

Almighty God,
give us reverence for all creation
and respect for every person,
that we may mirror your likeness
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 7th February 2021

A reading from Colossians 1:15-20

The Supremacy of the Son of God

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

A Gospel reading from the Gospel of John, Chapter 1: 1-14

The Word Became Flesh

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was with God in the beginning. **3** Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. **4** In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome^[a] it.

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. **8** He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

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⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

A reflection from Canon Alison Myers, Lead minister in Hardwick and Dry Drayton

You may know what it's like to have something to write – an essay, a letter, a lecture, an article - and to have a blank piece of paper, or a blank screen, in front of you. I know I do. You know that you have something to say, but you just don't know how to start.

I imagine John feeling like that as he sat down to make a start on his gospel. He wanted to tell the stories of Jesus, and also to make clear their significance. As with the other gospels, the first section of writing had to set out the themes, the essence, of what he had to say. I can see him chewing the top of his pen, looking at what he has written so far, then scrunching up the paper and throwing it on the floor to join the other balls of paper around his feet. Then it comes to him, and he starts to write, "In the beginning was the Word...".

And he writes the much loved piece of theology and poetry that we heard read today.

The Superman and Spiderman theories

What was it that was so important for the writer to express in just the right words, and images right up front there? He wants us to understand, in so far as we are able,

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the enormity of what Christians call 'the incarnation' - something that takes us to the limits of human language and human concept.

The incarnation says that Jesus is both divine and human, fully God and fully human being. It's a big ask, to hold these two things together: human and God. And our tendency to separate the material and the spiritual pushes them apart. The rational bits of contemporary culture would prefer to believe that Jesus was just a man – a good man, perhaps a man given special powers for a while – but a man nevertheless. And the less rational bits search for a kind of free-floating divinity or spirituality which sometimes struggles to connect to the reality of life. However, unless we try to make the connection we miss the glorious grace and truth at the centre of our faith.

As it happens, there were similar debates going on at the time John's gospel was written, probably around the end of the first century. People were struggling with who Jesus actually was, and the implications of that.

Some people argued that he was just a man, a good and wise man and, perhaps, one given special powers for a while. But basically just a man. Others thought in contrast that Jesus was God and therefore spirit, but being spirit he had to remain separate from humanity. So they thought he just seemed to be human.

I've heard these two theories as the difference between Spiderman and Superman. Spiderman is a human who is given special powers. Superman, by contrast comes from another planet but, as Clark Kent, pretends to be human. The official names for each of these theories if you are interested are Arianism and Docetism, called heresies by the early church. We may not use that word now, but neither represents the full truth and wonder of the incarnation.

Jesus is neither a man with special powers, nor a spirit that seems to be human. Jesus uniquely combines two natures, both humanity and divinity. And he is not half human and half divine, he is both fully human and fully divine. And yes, I know that is a bit mind-blowing.

'Our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man'

Let's look at how John unpacks this. He starts with the Word... "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."

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What does he mean by the Word? In Greek thought at the time, the Word, or Logos, is the mind, or reason, of God, the expression of God's self. The Logos was the creating, guiding, directing power of God. So to re-read those first verses – in the beginning was the guiding, directing mind of God, the expression of God's self, through which all things were made.

John's phrase "in the beginning" artfully echoes the first words in Genesis – "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." At every stage of the creation as laid out there, God spoke and something happened. The words of God in Genesis are also the active, creative, dynamic power of God.

So, both the words in Genesis and the Word of John 1 with a capital W, are the creative, dynamic, life-giving expression of God, from the very beginning of life.

Now hold that idea as we jump forward to the other half of John's argument, that this same Word, this creative, life-giving expression of Godself "became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

God's creative, life-giving power came to live among us. In Jesus, the Word became human being. The portrait of Jesus that John goes on to give us in his gospel is of a Jesus who is weary and thirsty at the well, who spits when healing a blind man, who weeps at the tomb of Lazarus. A Jesus who is without doubt a part of the grittiness of real human life. He does not stay detached from it.

Looking at it another way, a more literal translation of "he made his dwelling among us" is "he pitched his tent among us". This prompts a picture in my mind's eye of a campsite of tents all looking pretty much the same. With people going about their daily tasks of cooking, washing, entertaining the children, having a cup of coffee. And Jesus' tent is pitched next to ours, in the thick of ordinary life – a tent just like ours, amongst ours. He pitched his tent amongst us. He came and made his home here in our world amongst the human race. He became one of us.

The transcendence of the life-creating power of God does not stay transcendent only, but in Jesus becomes immanent. Beyond us becomes here with us. A phrase from a Charles Wesley hymn echoes around my mind: "Our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man".

The passage we read from Colossians links these ideas together from the opposite perspective – links the immanent to the transcendent. The Jesus Christ they have seen on earth whose life and death and resurrection they know about, he is the

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ultimate expression of the life-creating power of God. The author of the epistle writes: "All things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things and in him all things hold together. In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things."

Two different thoughts to take away

What can we take from this? Well, lots of things, but here are a couple of different things to be going on with that both warm me, and challenge me at the same time.

First of all, in the incarnation of Jesus, God in all his fullness comes to human beings. From the beginning of time his movement was always towards us, in creation, in covenant, in Christ, in love and welcome. God did not, does not, stand on divine ceremony and stay detached. In Jesus, he becomes fully human yet he brings his full divinity too into the gritty realities of human life. He pitches his tent amongst us, full of grace and truth. I wonder what difference it might make if we each understood this more fully or remembered it more often.

Secondly, the incarnation of Jesus integrates human life with the whole created order. We more easily think of Jesus Christ as the Word who was made flesh. We forget about Jesus Christ the Word who was at the beginning of creation, or the One in whom all created things hold together. Perhaps if we reflected on these more often, our relationship with the natural environment would become a matter of deeper faith, increasingly personal, a more integral part of a Christ-centred life.

In the incarnation of Jesus Christ, both fully human and fully divine, life-creating Word of God, in whom all things hold together, God became part of the messy chaotic web of human relationships between each other and with the natural environment. In doing so he has shown us how to be human in a way that carries the life of that original divine creating force. [The incarnation of] "Jesus is God's rash gamble that deep down humanity might want to become more humane." (Walter Wink). As John put it so beautifully at the start of his gospel: 'the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory... full of grace and truth.'