

St.Thomas – Sermon Midnight Mass 2019

Titus 3.4-7
John 1.1-14

Titus 3.4-7

⁴When the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Saviour appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

⁶This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour,

⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Luke 2.1-20 The Birth of Jesus

²In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The Shepherds and the Angels

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Christmas is the season to pause at the stable and marvel at God's love....

... Christmas is all about God loving us, and wanting to be with us. That's the truth to take into our post-Christmas break, and the rest of our lives. We might try to be still for a time each day, and let God love us. (Ann Lewin, O come Emmanuel, 2012, p. 39)

How do we know that we are loved?

I was thinking about who loves me?

- My parents ...although it is not always an easy relationship, but I know they love me
- My grand parents have now passed away, but they love me
- My sister – we had to work at our relationship once we reached adulthood ...and I know she loves me as I am ...because she knows me really well, warts and all
- My husband ... after 20 years of marriage: he knows me well; he puts up with me when in the pressures of everyday life the worst of me is there as well as the good bits
- My children ...when they were little their affection was more obvious...now, as teenagers - when I stop having to be in charge and let them be: I can tell that they love me
- Sometimes very surprising people come into our lives and show us love ..a neighbour, a stranger ...
- And for some of us it's our pet who loves us.

Tonight we are here to pause at the crib of a baby who says to me and to you:

I love you. I love you because you are you. I love you.

Tonight God says: I was at the beginning of the world. I am love. I made everything and everything is because I am Love. I want you to know that I love you.

I have come as a baby to tell you I love you, so you would come and stay with me for a while, let my love touch your heart, let my love live in you , fill your heart. If you want to, you can love me too.

So, How do we love?

We love people, and indeed our pets, because there is something in them that elicits affection in us; something that compels us in a good wayperhaps, we love them because they need us, they trust us, they allow us to love them.

A friend of mine had her first baby in the summer – a difficult pregnancy was followed by a difficult birth. The baby soon recovered from the trauma of the birth but her mum's body took several months to heal, which affected her mental health and ability to care for the baby. The baby needed her; Dad could only do so much and had to go to work – so she reached out to family, who live a long way away, and to friends to support them; now, several months later, the baby is growing and smiling and my friend is eventually well enough to take care of her baby and enjoy being a mum and to feel the love as well as showing the love that's been there all along.

How does love grow?

Another friend of mine, a woman in her 80ies, fell two weeks ago and fractured her pelvis. She was very distraught – frightened of what might happen to her; distraught to be in hospital two weeks before Christmas. She is a single lady, with no family, relies on the kindness of friends. When I visited her in hospital, we talked about what makes a good Christmas, and she said to me: one of the best Christmases she can think of, is one she spent volunteering in a hospital -being there for people on the wards on Christmas Day.

She said the atmosphere was amazing, nurses and other staff being more relaxed than usual, everyone being attentive to one another. The memory cheered her up, took away some of her fear and distress.

Since then she has had surgery on her pelvis in Addenbrookes in Cambridge and is very grateful to be back in Ipswich hospital for Christmas. In her vulnerability she knows she will receive some of the love she has given to others.

At Christmas: God says: I love you and I want to be with you.

God came to us as a baby, saying 'I love you'.

Will you take care of me so I can grow up, become one of you, love you beyond imagination?

This is how the story of Jesus begins, God sharing our vulnerability, relying on Mary and Joseph, and others, to be fed, to be looked after, to learn to walk and to grow up.

God says to us: I am weak and vulnerable, so you can get to know me, you can come alongside me, you can love me. ...and love will grow and spread and fill the world as I created it to be.

And so God, in Jesus lives an amazing life – of accepting people, showing compassion, wisdom, how to love – risking giving himself away; risking being vulnerable – trusting the love that is at the centre of the universe.

How do we know that we are loved? Yes, it is through other people that God's love is made known to us; but there is also much deeper on offer for us – a love that knows us deep down, in our greatest weakness, vulnerability and longing – at those times when we struggle to love ourselves: God is there saying: I love you so much! Could you love me and share in my love?

Christmas is the season for us to pause at the crib and marvel at God's love.... God saying: I love you – just as you are. I love you and I am with you, if you invite me in.

That's the truth to take with us tonight and into the rest of our lives. How about trying to be still for a time each day, and let God love you?

Amen.

941 words