

Year A, Christmas Day

December 25th, 2016

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Hebrews 1:1-4

An Expose of Love!

“In the past, God spoke through the prophets to our ancestors in many times and many ways.” Here are some examples of his speaking in the past. Isaiah wrote, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of a messenger who proclaim peace, who brings good news, who proclaims salvation.”

Then there is the passage we read last night: “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light, on those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned....A child is born to us, a son is given to us, and authority will be on his shoulders. He will be named wonderful counselor, Might God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”

On the second Sunday of Advent we read “A shoot will grow up from the stump of Jesse; a branch will sprout from his roots. The LORD’s spirit will rest upon him, a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of planning and strength, a spirit of knowledge and fear of the LORD.”

With each Sunday as we move toward Christmas the references become clearer and the message more focused on the child whose birth we celebrate this day.

In addition to many times, God spoke through the prophets in many ways. An example is the Book of Job where Job becomes like Jesus on the cross with enemies all around pointing their finger of accusation. Job says he is innocent but his friends say he is not; even his wife joins them in accusing him. Job prophetically shows that the innocent can be wrongly accused and all the accusers in error. Only the falsely accused knows the truth. Job prepares the way for another accused, innocent man who, from the cross, forgives the human species for their proclivity to live off false accusation and exclusion.

And then there is the Saturday Night Live Comedy of Jonah where Jonah attempts to escape being God’s messenger of love and reconciliation to Jonah’s hated enemy and finds himself in the belly of a whale; a most uncomfortable place. Upon being burped up and having learned his lesson, he goes to the Nineveh urging repentance and they do repent! But Job was so looking forward to seeing them destroyed that he pouts outside the city, angry that God was so merciful. The story is prophetic in showing the human desire for revenge countered by God’s grace for all; even the Ninevites we hate.

Well, all of that was before. These were some of the ways God tried to get through to the human species in the days before Jesus’ birth. “In these final days, though, he has spoken to us through a Son.” The text then adds some elaborative detail about this Son. “God made his Son the heir of everything and created the world through him.” In other words, God put his Son in the central position and he will inherit everything that he was central to creating in the first place.

“The Son is the light of God’s glory and the imprint of God’s being.” If you want to see how wonderful God is look at Jesus. If you want to see what God is like look at what Jesus does.

Given this information, we now have a way of answering the question, “What Child Is This? #219” I would like us to sing verses 1 and 3. (We sing the carol.)

In verse 1 we have the question “What child is this?” The refrain answers “This, this is Christ the King and urges us to “Haste, haste to bring him laud.” (Laud means praise, adoration and worship; the very thing we are doing this morning.)

You notice we skipped verse 2. It asks, “Why lies he in such mean estate?” The meaning of “mean” has changed since the carol was written. Then it meant poverty and being at the bottom of the cultural hierarchy. So the question becomes why was Jesus born in such poverty? It’s a good question but I find the hymn writer’s answer confused. His answer is “Good Christians, fear, for sinners here the silent word is pleading.” It sounds like Jesus, the silent word in the manger, pleads with God to save sinners, as though God were tempted to destroy them. But this can’t be accurate if Jesus shows us the face of God. Remember, Jesus is “the light of God’s glory and the imprint of God’s being.” Jesus doesn’t buy off God for us; he reveals God to us. The verse makes God look “mean” and I mean “mean” in the modern sense. We don’t need any more of that mentality in the world.

This verse could read, “Good Christians, rejoice, for all humans see God’s human voice lying in a manger.” This rendition has nothing about it that is threatening. I am sure the poets among us could make it work with the meter of the carol.

Verse three focuses exclusively on our response to Christ the King. “So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh, come, peasant king, to own him; the King of kings salvation brings, let loving hearts enthrone him.”

Now we briefly go back to our passage from Hebrews. “He maintains everything with his powerful message.” I don’t know how he does that. Perhaps without love the whole cosmos collapses. Maybe the writer believes love is behind everything and maintains everything. Certainly Jesus was the most powerful expression of love I have ever experienced. If Jesus was willing to die and then God raises him to life again maybe Christ is the source of life behind it all.

We continue, “After he carried out the cleansing of people from their sins, he sat down at the right hand of the highest majesty.” The crucifixion was Jesus’ way of cleansing people from their sins. In it he shows us what we constantly do to one another in our pointing of the finger and excluding. He shows us this by making himself the object of our pointing and then while we are excluding him, forgives us. The crucifixion also has the effect of separating God from all violence and pinning it squarely on human shoulders where it belongs.

Having been crucified as an expose of love, Jesus goes to sit down at the right side of the highest majesty. The writer of Hebrews claims “the Son became so much greater than all the

other messengers, that he received a more important title than theirs." I think the writer of Hebrews would agree with me that the title given is "Lord of all."

The last bonus hymn for Christmas Day ties it all together. Let's stand and sing "Infant Holy, Infant Lowly." #229 in The United Methodist Hymnal. (We sing it and I conclude by saying "amen" and leading in a spontaneous prayer.)