



Sunday 4 February 2018 – 2nd Sunday before Lent
Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Readings: Colossians 1 15-20 St John 1: 1-14
Given by the Rev'd Juliette Robilliard

'He was in the world and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him ... and his own people did not accept him'

From Chapter 1 St John's Gospel

What a sad indictment on all humanity because, I suspect, if the incarnation happened here in Guernsey in our lifetime the outcome would still be the same. The problem is, just as the Jews, we all have expectations about who God is and what he will do for us with the result that too often, we end up making God in our own image rather than accepting that he created us in his. Let's look more closely at this very familiar yet superbly written beginning to John's gospel and discover what more it tells us about God.

He is THE Word. When God speaks, things are created. He brings light to our darkness; he exchanges decaying earthly life with lasting spiritual life for those who believe in him; he removes our misconceptions with the enlightenment of his grace and truth. In a world where fake news, even fake pornography seeks to deconstruct lives by destroying the truth, how vital it is that we keep our relationship with God, THE Word, active.

But don't just take my word for it, let's take a short deviation to seek the views of an enlightened authority, to St Paul and his letter to the Colossians in which he says of God that he is the first born of all creation; all things are created through him; he is the first reborn from death to eternal life; he was pleased to reconcile himself to all creation through the grace of his shed blood. It's always good, isn't it, to have a second opinion that reinforces something we feel to be right.

Ah! But just when we'd got that bolted down let me throw a curved ball. St Paul reminds us that God the Father is invisible. Fortunately, St John informs us of the one feature of God that we have seen - his glory - the glory of a Father's only son, full of grace and truth, when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

How do we comprehend glory? I think by being utterly realistic. Life is not all unalloyed pleasure but Jesus never promised that it would be. In fact, he was quite clear that those who sought to be his disciples should shoulder the cross and take part in his ministry and mission as many sermons, including mine, encourage. Granted, it's important to focus on what we could be doing as Christians, but it's as important being Christians because this is the antidote to bearing crosses. If we do not take time to be still and know God then we will never fully appreciate the many blessings that God bestows on us.

I said at the start of the service that we have moved away from Christmas when we focused on Christ of Bethlehem and now as Lent approaches we turn to face Christ of Calvary. The way to glory is not all sweetness and light but death on the cross. Only in the depths of God's loving sacrificial act has he made it possible for us not only to see his glory but to share it by making it our own. When Christ was impaled on the cross he gave us nails to cling on to, whatever befalls us.

The trouble with taking time to just be still in God's presence is that our world is full of many addictive distractions, for example, mobile phones. We take an hour apart to be before God on a Sunday but our mobile, although on silent, is quivering persistently in our pocket and the temptation to take a sneak peek is always there. It's at times like these that we are in danger of mocking the Eucharistic liturgy. Let's consider this thought in more detail.

For instance, at the start of the service we are welcomed into God's presence; next we ask for his forgiveness and he grants it. But, soon after absolution or perhaps during the sermon, mundane matters spring back into minds or on our mobiles! Yet, the very next thing we do is ask in the intercessions for even more blessings. We then exchange the peace and, isn't that an amazing grace? In other parts of the world Christians are not allowed to give any positive expression of their shared faith for fear of persecution not just by the authorities but within their own families. Next, the Word and the Flesh become one in Christ of the Eucharist when we are all invited to gather at his table. Here, no one is excluded. Finally, we are sent out with God's blessing: what grace upon grace.

We need to cling on to those nails that Christ bore for us more firmly and simply receive his glory with heartfelt thanks to make it ours. If we seek to give up something for Lent, let's give up busy-ness: instead, let's recharge and refocus on God's glory or, as the last line of the gradual hymn said, let us be '...lost in wonder, love and praise'*.

Amen.

* *Love divine, all loves excelling*, Charles Wesley 1707-1788