Colossians 1.15-20, John 1.1-14: Feb 2021

In films there is often a moment when reality is revealed. It is a well-known narrative twist- you thought, you hoped, you believed, you feared that the world was like *this* but- look- it’s really like *this*. The Matrix and The Lego Movie. The Truman Show and the Wizard of Oz. And so many others- all built on the central conceit that there is a truth underlying everything which is not immediately visible or apparent but, when you see it, feel it, experience it, buy into it, everything makes sense.

Usually in these stories the baddies are desperately trying to keep us ignorant so they can maintain their power and position. The difference in our Bible readings is that we are not being kept from the truth by a conspiracy- we as humans are the conspirators, the baddies, wilfully and willingly choosing not to see what is right in front of us in the person of Jesus. In Christian terms the moment when the curtain is pulled back or the mask taken off is a moment of epiphany, a moment of transfiguration. The truth is shown to the world when the Magi kneel by the crib. The disciples understand the glory of God made manifest in the flesh of Jesus, a glory shown in the window behind me here.

Here is God in the form of Jesus. Touch reality, we are told, look behind the curtain, know the truth. The Word who spoke the world into being chooses to become part of it. He pitches his tent among us to show us how to be human, how to be fully alive, what is worth living and dying for.

The two readings we’ve just had are not easy ones to engage with at the best of times, and it is fair to say that we are not actually living through the best of times, certainly not the easiest of times at the moment. These are precious readings, nonetheless, because in them God is inviting us to come home, back to the light, back to the truth, back to the beginning of the world, home to the Word who spoke all things into life, home to the Word who is the self-expression of God, back to the Word who is Love Incarnate, even Jesus Christ. Step out of fear and frustration and pressure and busyness and the daily grind. Come away, we are invited, and come home to the truth underlying and enabling all things. See God and let go and let God be God. Just wonder.

The section of Colossians we’ve just heard is an early Christian hymn which the writer has stuck in here to explain poetically but also very deeply who Jesus truly is. In doing that, the writer is showing who God is, and what it is to be truly human.

Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the hymn says. All things have been created through him and for him. In him all things hold together. He is the head of the church, the beginning, and in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

It is a beautiful hymn. We look at Jesus and we see God. What Jesus cares for is what God cares for. The one who created everything is the head of the Church, who has reconciled everything and everyone to God through the blood of his cross.

Creation whirls around us, constellations and planets and time and light and oceans and mountains and all history and the whole of the future, all at his command and call, at the command of the one who speaks tenderly to us and gently lifts our face to feel the warmth of the dawn, at the command of the one who we crucified because of our fear and our guilt and our desperation to not need God but to do be able to do it all on our own, at the command of the One who stepped out of the tomb in the early light having reconciled us to God by his endurance. Creation whirls around us held in the palm of his hand, wondrous and wonderful, wonder after wonder, held out to us with a smile for our delight. And how could we not smile back when we see his good pleasure, in the swirling cosmos and our deep joy to be his?

Because John uses the Word- Logos- so heavily in the start of his Gospel we tend to think of that as being the main theme of the Gospel. But you have just heard two thirds of the number of times that idea is used- the Light motif is far more important to John throughout his Gospel- the Light coming into the world, the Light of God, the glory of God, a Light which the darkness can never put out.

These readings invite us to stand and pause and truly see the truth if only we stop to notice. The Word who spoke all things into life is woven into the whole world all around us: we look up and find him at work in the heavens: we look down and we find him standing next to us to lift us to our feet, his hand in ours.

The one who scattered stars into space knows your name.

The one who first breathed life into the dust walks with you every single step.

The one who was before anything was delights in you and is delighted by you. He looks at you and says “Well, that is very good.”

Wonderfully, the creativity and life and light and love we see at play around us is focused and condensed into the person of Jesus, who shows us in his life and his death what it is to be human- to be generous in giving and selfless in service, to be caring and courageous and without prejudice, to point to God in everything by letting God work through and in us.

This Jesus brings us with him to the heart of God. It is this Jesus who says “Do not be afraid.” It is this Jesus who says “I must wash your feet.” It is this Jesus who says “Take and eat.” It is this Jesus who weeps at the tomb of Lazarus and faces down tyrants and lifts the lame back to their feet and restores sight, like trees walking, and touches speech into sound. It is this Jesus who is tender with the powerless and fierce with those who abuse their position. It is this Jesus who is our head, the Light, the Truth, the Way, with us and never separated, never distant, never away, never uninterested, never losing us or abandoning us or letting go.

If God is for us, who is against us?

If God is with us, what else matters?

Planets spiral. Stars dance and twinkle. Time telescopes around us. And at the centre of it all, at the centre of everything, in the apple of God’s eye, in the tender and beautiful heart of Jesus, hidden safe in the Spirit’s wings, you and God always, since before the beginning of time and beyond the ending of the world and for all eternity… held by inseparable, constant, redeeming love.

If God is with us, what else matters?

Held by inseparable, constant, redeeming love.

And in the heart of Jesus, and in the apple of God’s eye, and hidden in the safety of the Spirit’s wings… you. Us. All those we love, living and departed and still to come to birth. Always. Held tenderly in God’s inseparable, constant redeeming love.

What we hear this day may we believe- and believing it, and trusting it, may we walk a little taller and care a little deeper and love a little braver because all of these things flow from the Love of God. In fear and darkness, in uncertainty and frustration, in illness and isolation, in all of this and so much more, may we know that we are loved and held and precious- and may knowing that turn darkness to light. Amen.