

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Jan 11th 2017

He had to become like his brothers and sisters in every way, that he might be ... merciful and faithful.
(Hebrews 2:17)

God so loved the world that He sent his son. These words cover the arch over the altar at our church. Love always has consequences. It tends to draw us in deeper. God faced a choice: love the world across the infinite abyss posited by Pascal or enter into history as a mewling babe clutching his parents. Why not love from afar? Why not save the world by fiat? Why be born into a poor Jewish family, under the rule of a mighty empire? God makes the wager and sends his son. The Word becomes flesh and assumes the precarious reality of the particular. What the world sees as real takes new form, and we are left in wonder.

Power can distance us from ordinary things. Those who pass judgment or issue decrees are seldom found around the kitchen table sharing the day's news. Jesus reveals the truth of both God and humanity. His power does not arise from thrones, wealth, or weapons but from his embrace of humanity. He eats with friends, talks to strangers, heals the sick, preaches the word, and seeks his father in quiet places. From Jesus we learn our truth: we are known in the stillness of prayer, in community, in living simply, in struggles for justice, and encounters with those at the margins. By surrendering to our humanity we find God.

We can know about a situation and we can know directly from experience. We study theories and memorize statistics. Then we hear how a friend can't pay medical bills on her meager earnings. This is how we are known: God dives to our core and does not settle for aboutness. Wherever we go, God's already there. Nothing beats the joy of being gently known. Nothing drives away fear like being loved. We are not forgotten. There was no mistake. Paul says that Jesus became like us in every way. He laughs, mourns, and his tears are wiped away. This is how we are loved.

When her fever subsides, Peter's mother prepares food for her guests. As our eyes open, we see what needs to be done. The messiness of things does not negate the goodness of the world. We are alive and grateful. Realizing our own poverty, we find God in the poor and join ranks with those who work for justice. These words are spoken in our heart: "For this purpose have I come."

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