

2 January 2022 John 1:1-18 Second Sunday after Christmas
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It's not out of the ordinary
For me as a pastor to be talking with people
Who aren't so keen on God:
Maybe they are angry at God,
Maybe they are fearful of God,
Maybe they simply don't think that there is a God
And are upset by what people do in God's name.
All these attitudes are understandable,
And perhaps not so far from where we have been in our own lives,
Or even where we are now, to a greater or lesser extent.

But it's also not out of the ordinary for me to find
That the same people who are not keen on God,
Are alright with Jesus:
They find Jesus' teaching somewhat compelling,
And they find the character, the figure of Jesus, attractive.

Again, I think this is understandable:
When we read the Gospels Jesus' character, his spirit,
Leaps off the page.
And when we hear his words,
And the message of his life, death, and resurrection,
Something is stirred within in us as human beings.

And yet there is something disturbing about Jesus as well.
The teaching that he gives threatens our autonomy:
He gives commands, not suggestions,
And the law he preaches is clearer, stricter, and purer
Than we hear anywhere else, including the Old Testament.
Remember: Jesus accepts the authority of the Old Testament,
But brings it a sharp and unavoidable point.

Likewise, the demands Jesus makes on us,
The personal demands that he makes on our own lives,
That we take up our cross and follow him,
Are not the demands made by a nice, reasonable,
And generally attractive human being.

Jesus gives divine commands,
And he makes divine demands.
And he does this because he is God in the flesh:
When we encounter Jesus, we encounter God.

The Good News that I'm proclaiming today,
Is that Jesus not only gives us commands,
That he not only makes demands on our lives -
Because these things on their own would be threatening to us -
But that he reveals to us what God is like
In his life of love for us – in his self-sacrificial love for us.
It's this Good News that free us to receive Jesus as he is,
To receive his commands, to receive his demands,
And to have his love reach its goal among us
As we love each other.

At Christmas time we celebrate the incarnation,
We celebrate the Son of God taking on human flesh
And being born as a human being, and living a human life.
And we celebrate that in this incarnation we see God revealed
In human flesh.

This is how we hear it in today's Gospel reading: **No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.** John 1:18

Here's the idea:

If any human being wants to know what God is like,
Then they need to look no further than the human being Jesus Christ.

Let's say you're reading a book or watching a movie,
And a character is spoken about but has not yet appeared.
As a reader or a viewer you're wondering
What the character will be like: what they'll look like,
What they'll say, what they'll do; what will happen to them.

Well, it's like the whole of creation is a great drama,
And in Christ Jesus God appears on centre stage,
But he does not come down from on high with thunder or lightening,
Instead, he is born of a humble woman, born under the law,
Born in a stable, placed in a feeding trough for animals.

So, the Scriptures proclaim, that in this great drama of life,
If we want to see God the Father,
If we want to see the great dramatist himself,
Then we will find him in the human being Jesus Christ.

It's not just that John puts it this way as the narrator of the Gospel,
It's also what we hear from Jesus' own lips.
Later in John we hear words
That are often read out at funerals,
That have, in fact, been read out

At the last two funerals here at Bethlehem: **Philip said to [Jesus], ‘Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. John 14**

This is the assurance of Jesus himself to us:

To see him is to see the Father,

It is to see God himself.

As Christian people, we know that encountering God in Jesus
Has practical implications.

This perhaps puts it weakly.

Encountering God in Christ Jesus has *power*:

Power to transform our lives so that we are free to love others

With the same love that God has for us.

In John’s letter to Christian believers in the early church,
We read these words: **Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.**

In the Scriptures God is not simply anger or threat,

Or a word used by human beings to get power

Over the weak and vulnerable; rather, God is love.

But not love as a pleasant sentiment or a general niceness,

But love that is willing to get its hands dirty,

Love that is willing to make sacrifices.

This is how the reading goes on: **God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.**

God’s love is revealed through his Son:

This is what we have been dealing with today –

That in Jesus we see God.

But notice how in this letter John gets more specific:

That God’s love is revealed in the act of sending his Son,

That it is revealed in Jesus being at atoning sacrifice for our sins.

In Jesus’ willing sacrifice of himself on the cross,

We see how far human love is willing to go,

We see how far divine love is willing to go,

So that we may become sharers in life with God.

It’s in hearing this message of God’s great love for us,

It’s in this Good News,

That the power of God resides,

A power that frees us to love each other.

This is how the letter goes on: **Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.** 1 John 4:7-12

It's God's love for us that is the power of our love for others.

More than this,

It is in loving each other that we *see* the invisible God,

And that we see the love of the invisible God,

First and foremost made manifest in the human being Jesus Christ.

It's in loving each other that God's love is *perfected* in us.

That is:

It's in loving each other that God's love reaches its goal,

That it produces a rich harvest,

It's in loving each other that the drama of God's creation

Comes to its satisfying conclusion.

And we have ample opportunity, as God's people,

To show love for each other,

As we receive each other as brothers and sisters of the one Father.

As we make the effort to get to know each other.

As we give thanks to God for each other.

As we encourage each other,

As we help each other in simple and practical ways.

And as we forgive each other from the heart.

We can't see God unless he reveals himself to us,

And in Christ Jesus we see God in the flesh.

It is through his sacrificial love for us

That God frees us from of natural fear of him,

And brings us to maturity on the path of love.

May God keep us on this path

So that his light shines in our life together

For or good and to his glory.

In Jesus' name. Amen.