

Wesleyan Methodist Church Sunday 20th December 2015

God became flesh and stepped into our darkness...

Bible Passages: John 1:1-18; 1 John 1:5-7

Intro: Rescue mission

Story of the possum down the chimney

- Describe the story
- It needed rescuing... could not get out by itself.
- I reached into the darkness and set it free

In a similar way God has reached into our world to set us free. I want to develop this thought this morning.

If we simply think of Christmas in isolation from the rest of God's wonderful Story we are at risk of reducing it to a heart-warming, feel-good tale about a cute baby. We know it is much more than that but many in our world don't understand the big picture and therefore the significance of baby Jesus.

- As I told the Christmas story in my SRI classes this year I made an effort to place it in the context of God's Big Story.
- God has a Big Rescue Mission for the world (show bible)

I love the way the Gospel of John tells the story of Jesus entering our world. Different to Matthew and Luke who give intimate detail about Jesus' birth, John places the birth of Jesus within a Meta Story. He begins in the heavenly cosmos before the world was created... Add to this.

What John is telling us in a nutshell in John 1:1-18 is the big story of Jesus and his rescue mission so that we can place the earthly story of Jesus into a context.

As we approach Christmas this year may we see the bigger picture? Can we first note that...

1. Jesus was qualified to rescue

Tell story: Rhonda's dad is a good bloke but like all of us he had made some errors of judgement at times. One day... (tell story of being rescued from the rip in Lakes Entrance)

- Surf Jet Ski vessels are amazing to watch. I initially thought, 'Can they really rescue us?'
- When I saw how skilled they were... describe.
- "Jump on!"
- They were certainly qualified to rescue and I needed to trust them.

How was Jesus qualified to rescue?

- He was with God in the beginning. Not only with God but was God. Eternal.
- He made all things. Verse 3 says there is nothing made that Jesus didn't do himself.
- So in Jesus' pre-existent state he had the points on the board to rescue us. What about after his birth while he ministered on earth? Well he healed, raised people from death, loved and spoke tenderly to people.
- What do we see today? Tell story of Murray. Healed from Parkinson's Disease.
- Jesus certainly is qualified to rescue us.

Secondly we note that...

2. Jesus became like us

I think that one of the most profound verses in the bible is John 1:14. 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.'

- Explain, **Word**: God's Self-expression who was with God in the beginning and was God. Word: Logos in ancient Greek times was used to describe intellectual thought but John applies it to a person. Not just any person but the God who, in the beginning, created by a simple word. We say that words are powerful. Words we say define who we are and they also define others and create situations. Think about, 'I love you.' 'I hate you.' 'You are useless.' 'You are special'. 'You are fired.' 'I need you.'
- **'The Word became'**: When the 'Word became flesh' or we could say when 'God became human', we need to understand that this is not Jesus acting or pretending the role of being human, and it was not Jesus simply reflecting humanity from afar. In the context of 1st century Hellenistic society John needed to choose his words well as the popular culture of the time believed not in one God but many gods. So when John said 'became' it meant that the Son of God was fully existent in the flesh and not elsewhere also. We're not talking separate gods here.
- **'The Word became flesh'**: Flesh is a crude tangible term. As opposed to God who is Spirit and therefore eternal, flesh speaks of vulnerability and frailty. Word become flesh revealed that God actually became who we are, except for sin although later on the cross he took our sin upon himself.

God could have chosen to send Jesus with some robustness and protection, maybe as a readymade mighty warrior or political leader who lived in a secure compound. But no the 'flesh' of Jesus couldn't get any more vulnerable if you had tried:

- A defenceless baby
- To an um-married teenager
- Poor family in a poor town with no rights

- Fleeing for their life as a refugee into a neighbouring country

Imagine if Queen Elizabeth II decided that her great grandson, little Prince George who is third in line to the throne, was to get a dose of commonality so that he could grow up knowing how the average person lived and thought. So they decided to dump him on the street and allow the first person who come along to take care of him knowing that he would be fostered out, never having security or a permanent home.

This would be scandalous and neglectful particularly for the future king of England. Yet God took His Son from a much higher place than Prince George will ever occupy and placed him in a more vulnerable position than we could ever imagine. I'm sure you can see my point.

God had a beautiful plan. In essence 'Word becoming flesh' is God expressing himself in a way that we could understand, God revealing himself totally as a real historic man.

'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.' Dwelling in the Greek is literally translated as 'tabernacle' or 'tent' and many of the readers would have been reminded of Moses meeting face to face with God in the Tent of Meeting outside the camp as they lived in the wilderness. So the idea that God, whom no one was able to gaze upon, actually becomes human whereby ordinary people are then able to meet face to face with him because he dwells within an accessible tent would have been quite a revelation to the original readers of John's Gospel.

I pray that it is a revelation to all of us this Christmas as we contemplate the full extent of its meaning.

God's big rescue mission was almost complete. His Son was qualified to rescue and he fully revealed himself to us so that we could understand God's purposes. We know that Jesus had his greatest challenge in front of him, to defeat sin and death but at this point...

Everything was done...

There is a song we sometimes sing called, 'Come to the Father'

Before the world began you were on His mind.
And ev'ry tear you cry is precious in his eyes.
Because of His great love He gave His only Son,
Ev'rything was done so you would come.

God amazing plan to redeem his lost world had been set in motion. It was a perfect plan made by a perfect God who had a perfect Lamb of God ready to become the perfect sacrifice. His love is so great for us that only the best will do.

Our song says, 'Ev'rything was done so you would come'. Well did they come when Jesus entered his earthly dwelling? Some did but many rejected Him including his own Jewish race. You see...

3. Jesus was misunderstood (and still is!)

Describe how the possum misunderstood me and rejected my friendship.

Our passage from John says, 'In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not understood (overcome) it.'

If we use the word 'overcome' here it makes the passage refer to creation. Explain. But if we use the word 'understood' the passage then refers to the people as darkness and that they are not able to understand Jesus who came as the light.

I prefer the word 'understood' as it makes more sense with the previous verse. Read. It also picks up on the meaning of verse 10-11.

'He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.'

It is a strong theme throughout John that even though people were exposed to the Word as flesh they struggled to believe and understand who Jesus was. In fact we see the purpose of John as,

'But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.' (John 20:31)

It is fair to say that we all struggle to understand God's purposes' in Jesus. Read John 3:19-21 in context of the chapter.

Little wonder that many misunderstood Jesus around his birth.

Whenever we struggle to comprehend something a transition needs to take place where we move from misunderstanding to understanding or from disbelief to belief. Recently Rhonda was talking to a lady whom she had just met and this lady was recounting her spiritual journey. She described her understanding of God as being about who God is and then some years ago she had an experience where she discovered God personally. It was then that she realised she had never known Jesus as a child of the King only known about him. She now had the assurance of a personal relationship with Jesus.

This lady had discovered what we all need to do; we need to...

4. Step into the Light

Now I didn't give the possum an option, it was coming out of that cavity whether it liked it or not; I didn't want a dead possum to deal with. But imagine if my possum was given the choice and it chose to stay behind rather than trust me. Expand.

My analogy breaks down at this point. But imagine if I could have sent my own son to become a possum and enter his world, he then would be able to communicate my concern and show the possum where life and freedom lay.

The Gospel writer makes it very clear that if we are to know this God who has become human then we need to make a decision, a choice. John 1:12 says, 'Yet to all who received him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.' We need to receive and believe.

Ange reminded us that Jesus is the Light of the world. Jesus as Light in the darkness of the world is a theme that runs right through the writings of John. John says, God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.

How would you describe your life right now?

- Is it full of light, dull, dim or even dark?

Or maybe a better question to ask is, where is Jesus, the light of the world, in relation to you?

- Is he standing off to the side and you can see him out through the window so to speak. You know about him but you are battling alone in the chaos and darkness of your world. Or...
- Is he right in the midst of your mess bringing much needed light in the form of love, joy, peace and hope into your world?

It is my prayer for you this Christmas that you would not battle alone rather that you would invite the Saviour of the world to sit in the control centre of your life while you sit in the passenger seat.

Conclusion: Recently I was sitting in a plane waiting to take off for England...

- Waiting a little anxiously. There was a delay as they serviced an oil filter.
- Captain spoke calm gentle words of what was happening and when
- I immediately felt calm. Why was that? Because he was calm and he sounded like he knew what he was doing.
- If he had said... This doesn't look good, I'm not sure what is wrong and I'm a bit worried about our take off. I hope it works etc.
- No he was in control and I needed to trust him.
- Jesus is like a pilot who has a 100% safety record. We can trust him completely. He says do not let your hearts be troubled, trust in God trust also in me. I'm taking you on a direct flight to the Father. You will go through some storms on the way but trust me because I'm the Son of God and I'm in control.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. John 1:1, 14