

Sermon: Christmas Day

The Rev. Mike Wernick

December 25, 2016

Year A

Isaiah 52:7-10

Psalm 98

Hebrews 1:1-4

John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Singularity... and the Singularity was with God... and the Singularity was God... the Singularity was in the beginning with God... and all things came into being through the Singularity... and without the Singularity not one thing came into being... in the Singularity was life... and the life was the Light of all that evolved as humanity... and the Singularity became flesh and dwelt among us... full of Grace and Truth... and we beheld its Glory... as of the only Son... from the Father...

This prologue from John's Gospel is also re-framed for us in Colossians: *He is the image of the invisible God... the firstborn of all creation... for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created... things visible and invisible... whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers... all things have been created through him and for him... He himself is before all things... and in him all things hold together... all things hold together... Jesus is something that holds all things together... like glue...*

In July 2012... physicists at the European Center for Nuclear Research... announced that they almost certainly... discovered evidence for the long-sought after Higgs Boson... a subatomic entity that has been called "the God particle"... theoretically... the Higgs Boson provides the "glue"... that allows matter to coalesce... to clump together... so that we can have stars... galaxies... and so we can have... us... it's mysterious... almost magical... that both Jesus... and the Higgs Boson... are described as holding things together...

Like a lot of children... I believed in the magic about which my parents told me... bits of magic which gave deeper meaning to my experience... and seemed to hold things together... how the Tooth Fairy came when I was asleep... and took my tooth...

including the one that my father tied a string to and pulled out... and then she... I thought she was a she... but maybe not... left a silver dollar... how the Easter bunny... yes... my Jewish family had an Easter bunny... came on Easter weekend... and left a basket full of chocolate...

And we all knew about Santa Claus... who brought presents on Christmas Eve... and almost always came down the chimney... when I was growing up... as far as I knew... few Jews considered what happened if you didn't *have* a fireplace... but when my daughter was four or five... we had a wood burning stove to heat the house... the flue was only eight inches in diameter... and even if you believed in the magic of Santa... you had to really stretch things... to think that this big man could slide down through an eight inch pipe... and one evening... Rachel asked us with some apprehension in her voice and face... does Santa have a key for our house... the possibility that someone other than her mom or me or her grandma could get into the house... at night... while we were sleeping... was way too creepy for Rachel...

And as a young person... as I learned more about the world around me... and more about religion... the magic of tooth fairies... and the Easter bunny... and Santa... made a quantum leap into miracle... like how the Chanukah candles we lit... were like the oil lamps they used when the Temple was being rebuilt... oil that lasted for eight days when it ought to have lasted only for one... how five loaves and two fish fed 5,000... how water was turned into wine... the sick were healed... the blind given their sight... and the dead raised...

There is Truth in Christianity... in Christian scripture... but it's the same Truth that transcends Christianity... and finds expression through other voices... it's the Truth... Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori referred to when she said: *For us Christians... Jesus is our doorway to God... but for us to think that God can't possibly act in some other way... is for us humans to put God in a very small box.*

This is the Truth that existed in the Singularity... before the blueprint of creation took shape... before there were Higgs Bosons... subatomic particles... atoms... molecules... before there were noble gases... stars... galaxies... planets... amoebas... fish... plants... birds... reptiles... dinosaurs... mammals... human beings... before tribes gathered into societies... before language... before codified religion... before the idea that you could lay claim to... and say you owned... something like Wisdom...

About two years ago... when he spoke at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences... Pope Francis said that the Big Bang... and theories of evolution are real... Francis said that neither theory was incompatible with the existence of a Creator... claiming instead that they "require it." He said: *When we read about Creation in Genesis... we run the risk of imagining God was a magician... with a magic wand able to do everything. But that is not so.*

Like our modern quantum physicists... who seek Truth... and bear witness to what they know... see... and believe... the author of John's Gospel also bears witness to what he knows... sees... and believes...

Preaching professor Cleophus LaRue... who teaches at Princeton University... wrote: *Every discovery of reality awaits the willingness of a witness to share what that witness has seen and heard... so it is here... in the prologue to John's Gospel... in this hymn... that we are introduced to the Glory of the eternal Word... standing in juxtaposition to the simple witness of a mortal prophet... herein lies John the Baptist's importance to the coming of Jesus into the world... though any number of scholars believe that the mention of John in the prologue stems from a later hand... John nonetheless bears witness to the redemptive drama unfolding before us...*

He was in the world... but the world did not know him... he came to his own people... but they did not accept him...

This hymn oozes with the scent of witness... its witness to the presence of Christ is focused primarily *beyond* the created world of time and space... but with the coming of John... the understanding of witness moves explicitly *into* the realm of human history... John's specific purpose for being in the world is to bear witness to Jesus... in the *synoptic* tradition John the Baptist introduces Jesus... but in the *fourth* Gospel... John's sole function is to act as a witness...

The True Light... the One who's consciousness identifies with the life-giving Word... has come into the world... but because we see only in a mirror dimly... we need poetry's help in seeing this Light... and this help is given voice in the poem by R.S. Thomas... called The Coming...

And God held in his hand a small globe. Look... he said.

The son looked.

Far off... as through water... he saw a scorched land of
fierce color.

The light burned there.

Crusted buildings cast their shadows.

A bright serpent... a river... uncoiled itself... radiant with slime.

On a bare hill... a bare tree saddened the sky.

Many people held out their thin arms to it... as though waiting
for a vanished April to return to its crossed boughs.

The son watched them.

Let me go there... he said.

There are threads of sentimentality woven into the magic stories we tell and share... threads of candle light that inform and guide us... and how we chew and digest ideas... the sweetness which life offers... and how we can be gift to each other... but these threads... are also threads of Truth... which weave a fabric of light and creation... a fabric of new life and reconciliation... a fabric which is woven of transcendence... which

bear witness over and over again to God's never-failing care which existed before time and space existed... and which exists in every moment... a Singularity which enfolds us with a singular love... and which came as the Christ Jesus... to hold us together... like a Higgs Boson... and to help us know the unconditional love with which the Father loves all of us... this is the witness that John came to bear... and this is the witness that we are called to share...

Merry Christmas...

Mike+