

“Love Made Visible”

Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-20 – Rev. Rebecca Littlejohn
Vista La Mesa Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), La Mesa, California – July 14, 2024

*Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that in seeking you in Jesus, we
might find you also in one another. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.*

As I was thinking about what the Christmas message is that we need today, I was reminded of a line from that marvelously wise funeral hymn by Natalie Sleeth, “In the Bulb There Is a Flower.” The third verse begins, “In our end is our beginning...” And while I’m sure she wasn’t thinking of a Christmas carol when she wrote those words, they do apply to what we’re doing today. This holiday, this Christ-mass, is centered on the idea that is the focus of our worship series this month, the Incarnation, this idea that God became – in ways mysterious and nuanced – human. And how does one become human? One is born, as a baby. I mean, my goodness, a baby! God as a baby, can you even wrap your head around that?

The song we will sing in just a few minutes begins with the line “God’s love made visible,” which is another way of describing the Incarnation. But to think about God being a baby makes you realize that to be visible is to be vulnerable. Babies are helpless, floppy and hungry and unable to even focus their eyes! Is there anything other than a baby that evokes our love at such an incomprehensible depth? To become human, to begin as a baby, is revealing the end in the beginning, because to become human is to take on mortality, as we know Jesus did. When we say that God took on human flesh,

we are declaring that God chose to become vulnerable; we are proclaiming that the way of Jesus is a path of vulnerability. It would be terrifying if it weren't so lovely. We would probably be freaking out, if that baby weren't so completely adorable. (God really knows how to push our buttons! "Ooh, send them a baby; they'll do anything for a baby!")

You can see that the gospel writers are struggling with this reality. Matthew and Luke both are very concerned that we are suitably impressed with Jesus' lineage and his Messiah-ship and the great glory and holiness involved. But they cannot help the fact that they're telling us the story of a baby born to an unwed mother, in a makeshift shelter, in an occupied nation. There are the majestic theological overtones, but they cannot hide the knife's edge of vulnerability upon which the Baby Jesus arrived. This danger matters. The fact that Jesus arrived as a vulnerable baby, born to a vulnerable, young mother, tells us something about the love that God was revealing by making God's love visible in this way. "In our end is our beginning."

The way of Jesus is the way of courageous vulnerability. The way of Jesus asks us to reveal love over and over again in our lives, and revealing love is always risky. Love comes unassuming, undemanding, and unarmed. It was risky even for Jesus. The vulnerability thing was cute when he was a baby. Thirty or so years later, some of his disciples really thought he needed a different approach. But it didn't work like that, did it? You can't change the nature of God's love to suit your preferences and satiate your longing for security. God's love was made visible in this tiny, helpless baby, and God's

love remained visible even as it was poured out from a cross. And yet, who dares call such vulnerable love weak? For we know that this love is at the center of the universe; this love is what called from creation from the deep; this love is what redeems the most deformed corners of our hearts and restores even the deepest brokenness of our souls.

We may long for a strong leader who will vanquish our enemies, but we cannot help but follow Jesus, who wants us to love our enemies. For as Simon Peter said, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.” That Word, that Love, that Light, it is the Light of the World. It does shine in darkness that cannot overcome it. It is constantly under threat, for the world’s siren call to violence is loud in our ears. But the path of Jesus is the path of peace, the path of sacrificial love, the path of courageous compassion. The path of Jesus is the one that has us walking alongside those most vulnerable in our midst, holding one another up when the road gets rocky. The path of Jesus keeps our eyes seeking the truth, when our hearts long for certainty even if it’s false. The path of Jesus asks us to do things we didn’t know we could do, to risk the judgment of others and open ourselves to new ways of doing things.

“In our end is our beginning.” All of this – all of this promise, all of this glorious adventure, all of this vulnerability – today is it held in the manger, in this God who is a baby, in this Love made visible. Hallelujah and Amen.