

God Became Human - Let Us Do Likewise

Isaiah 11:1-9; John 1:1-14; 2 Cor 5:17-21

“Reconciliation”

*Sermon preached by Rev. Dr Thorwald Lorenzen
on the occasion of the
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Sometimes people ask me: “What is *reconciliation* all about?” It is a big word. Like the word “God”, it is used a lot. But what does it actually mean? What *difference* does it make if we use that word intentionally? What *responsibility* do I accept when I use that word? Is there a *place for me* in the process of reconciliation, and how can I *occupy* that place? Let me try to throw a bit of light on these questions by suggesting that “*reconciliation*” is another word for “*Christmas*”.

Is not *Christmas* the time when we celebrate that *God* has shared his rich life with the poverty of our human existence? And is not *Christmas* the time when we celebrate *together*, have family reunions and include those who are out in the cold or out in the heat.

But like “reconciliation”, “Christmas” has also become a *problem* for many. While some look forward to see their *families and friends* and *celebrate* with them, others become intensely aware that they have no friends, that they are alone or that their family is dysfunctional.

Would you allow me to remind you of the *basic ingredients* of “*Christmas*” and of “*reconciliation*”. Ingredients which make it highly appropriate to have a Human Rights Sunday during Advent Season. The basic ingredients of “reconciliation” and “Christmas” are *that God became human*, which contains the invitation *to do likewise*.

God became human

At Christmas time, Christians around the world celebrate that God does not live in splendid isolation, but that God has shared his life with our world, with our history, and with our own individual stories. “*The Word*,” that reality which calls things into being, that reality which speaks meaning into our life, that reality which assures us that we are not alone even when we are lonely, that reality which gives us our ultimate identity, the Word “*became flesh and lived among us*,” we read in the New Testament. Some of the early Christians who experienced that God had become real and meaningful to them, responded: “*we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*”

God in all God's mystery and richness has touched our human poverty and frailty, our uncertainty and ambiguity. The *angels* and the *shepherds* and the *wise men* - they all wanted to participate in the celebration that *God's grace had become an event. That God's love had become historically manifest.*

We may smile when the Christian creed describes Jesus Christ as

“... the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
light from light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one being with the Father.”

It seems to come from another world. And it is from another world! Here the church is struggling for words trying to say what cannot be said. Christians wanted to say that God has touched us, our humanity, our history - without ceasing to be God. We are no longer homeless in the universe; we are no longer forlorn specs of dust in an empty nothingness.

At *Christmas* we celebrate that “*God has become human*”. That is the *ground for reconciliation*. That the God who is the *creator of all that is*, the God who is the *source of all life*, has laid the ground for reconciliation. Do you know what happened when Christ became real to the first Christians? Do you know what led to the first Christmas? A *new community* was formed in which there “is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28). People discovered that they were made to live together. That the barriers of race and colour and money are the result of selfishness; they resulted not from the celebration of freedom, but from the misuse of freedom.

Let us do likewise

By sharing his rich life with the poverty of our human existence, God has set the table. God has invited to the party, the party of life. By raising Jesus from the dead God has broken the chains of death, of selfishness and individualism, and spoken his YES to life.

Those who have heard *God’s YES* and make it their own (faith!), they begin to shape a *new community of equals*; a community in which there “is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28).

It is this “*newness*” that we are to *live*, and to *witness to*. Is the *Christian voice* loud and clear enough as we struggle for truth and justice in our society? Are we there in the storms of life, facing the wind and braving the waves, or are we withdrawing into the safe harbour of piety and comfort?

Christmas means that “*God has become human*” and those who have heard that, heard it with their hearts and in their conscience, they stand up and decide: “*let us do likewise*”.

The humanum

What does it mean to be “human”?

It means ***putting Christ back into Christmas!*** Christmas is more than a family occasion, just as reconciliation is more than two people shaking hands. Christmas is the *well* to drink from. Christmas is the *fire* around which we can gather and which can keep us warm. Christmas is the *spring* that provides clear and fresh water.

To be human means the realisation that we can only celebrate freedom *together*. Christ has given us the possibility to reverse the history of Cain and Abel, of brother fighting brother, of agriculturalists fighting nomads. As we put Christ back into Christmas we shall learn to live with *open arms* and *open hearts*. That will penetrate into every area of our being.

- ***Pride* will give way to *shame* and we shall be led to say *sorry* for the injustice that has occurred.**
- **We shall repent for our ignorance and our sleepiness and inactivity.**
- **The next time when someone tells a joke about Aboriginal people, we shall not be able to laugh.**
- **We shall open our hearts and our homes to the strangers in our midst.**
- **We shall realise that the real worship of God does not happen on Sunday, but from Monday to Friday, and when we go to the voting booth.**

My friends, “God” is a patient word. Saying “God” at Christmas time and meaning what we say, we confess that God has shared our lot, not to baptise it, not to validate it, but to change it in the direction of truth and justice.

You can give no greater Christmas gift to your country, you can give no greater Christmas gift to your children than to become an active participant in the process of reconciliation. We often don’t know where God is in this world. But where justice and peace kiss each other there the angels of heaven rejoice.