

Christmas 2020

Rottneest Island: Rev'd Michael Wood

John 1:1-14

*'the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not conquer it'*

There is no normal – only a new creation

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What a year this has been. Many words have been used to describe it. The words I most commonly hear to describe this year are 'strange' or 'weird'. But there are many other words. Here are a few others which we might have heard a few times:

Hand Sanitizer – wash your hands

Keep your distance – 1.5 metres

Closed borders – hard borders – controlled borders

Job Keeper – Job Seeker

Daily Press Conferences – Daniel Andrews; Peter McGowan

Lockdown

Hobbies; Family time; Break-making;

Mask wearing

Teddy bears on Front Fences

We are all in this together

Zoom meetings

Zoom dinners

QR Code readers

Donald Trump

Isolation

Anxiety

Depression

Family Separation

Loneliness

Uncertainty

Vaccines

Sickness

Death

Intensive Care

Health Workers

Norman Swan's Coronacast

Epidemiologists

Depression

Fear

Vaccines

Hope

Say goodbye to 2020

Covid Normal

New Normal

Tired

Exhausted

Christmas in the Rottneest Picture Hall - WEIRD

Some of us today will be missing our families. Like my family missing my brother and sister in law and their young daughter, from NSW who could not join us for Christmas this year. Like the person I was talked to the other day who cannot see her aging aunt in England. Or another friend whose family is in a little village in Italy where nearly every person in the village has Covid. One of her family has died and another is sick.

The charming Christmas Carol with the words, 'all is calm, all is bright' beautifully describes midnight mass in a snow covered German town – but the carol doesn't describe the world that Jesus was born into –it's violent oppression by the Romans; its poverty; its uncertainty; its lack of public health care; Jesus's family's need to leave home and seek refuge in a foreign country. The Carol, 'Silent night' doesn't describe what is going on in dozens of intensive care units, in this very moment in Europe, America and France.

And yet it is precisely this Covid world into which comes the 'light of the world' and about which John's gospel proclaims, *'the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not conquer it'*.

What kind of light IS this? It can't simply mean a kind of 'pie in the sky when you die' hope. This is not a light of deferred expectations. This is not a '2021 will be a better year' kind of optimism although we hope that will be the case.

It is a light that shines right now – in this very moment – right now – in the very strangeness of celebrating Christmas in the Rottneest Picture Hall.

The light that shines in the darkness is always new in this very moment. It is the light of the love of Christ. When an angel comes to Joseph in a dream to announce that Jesus will be born to Mary, it is seen as a fulfillment of a prophecy that, in Jesus, God is *Immanuel*, which means 'God with us'. God does not stand aloof or at a distance from our suffering, but is immersed in this life - a towel wrapped around his waist, washing the feet of his disciples.

The expression which Jesus uses most often to describe himself is the 'Son of Man' or 'Human One'. Jesus is the template of what it means to be human. In Genesis it says that humans are made in the image of God. Christians take this to mean that we are made in the image of Jesus. This does not mean, of course, that we are made in the image of a first century male Palestinian Jew. It means that to be human is be related to each other as God relates to the world in Jesus – immersed in the messy and often painful covid-ridden circumstances of life, humbly serving one another.

2020 has powerfully reminded us of our essential interconnectedness. Everything we do has an impact on others. The illusion that we are all autonomous individuals fighting tooth and claw for competitive advantage, like

Charles Darwin proposed, has been shattered. We have seen in 2020 what the writer Annie Dillard says is *'our complex and inexplicable caring for each other, for our life together here'* (Teaching a Stone to Talk).

If we want a powerful example of this, look at Melbourne – a city of 5 million people which cooperated for the common good – where people agreed, on a huge scale, to limit their individual interests, often at enormous emotional cost. Something of this scale cannot be achieved just by being told to do so by politicians or police. Something like this can only be achieved when there is a collective community agreement.

In 2020 Australians adapted. We learned that physical distance does not need to be social distance. We went on-line. We cared for our neighbours. We watched out for each other. We regained a collective moral compass. The journalist Waleed Ali described this as the country regaining its *'moral seriousness'* (ABC The Mine Field, 16 Dec 2020).

Our *'complex and inexplicable caring for each other'* is the manifestation of being made in the image of a God who IS loving relationship... who IS directly involved, in Jesus, in God's *human project* (Genesis 1:26). Mary's womb is the portal of divine love, connecting the infinite and the created realms.

Jesus is the latch that unlocks the doors of human kindness from inside every human heart – not just 2000 years ago but today.

The good news of Christmas is that there IS no return to normal. With Jesus, life is never normal. Life is only new. Normality implies living in accordance with the rules of the past. And if there is one thing we have been dramatically confronted with this year, is that many of rules of the past will not serve us in the future.

The light of Christ is ALWAYS doing a new thing.

- Like the cleaner we had a chat with at Melbourne airport a couple of week ago – at 6am – she was wiping down tables in the café – expunging viruses – an unseen servant, serving with love, keeping us safe. Doing this NEW thing every day. Living with job insecurity and early starts. Making a difference to the world.

- Like the Chief Steward in the airplane we were on, walking from person to person, listening attentively to stories of home-leavings and home-comings
- Like the young mother travelling alone with toddlers, supported by other travellers while she was feeding her baby – doing what Christ does – feeding us with his own body.

In Christmas, God is not a superpower promising us some immediate rescue, or promising to return us to any kind of normal which is defined by the past. All God can do, in this moment, is give his love – and what that looks like is always new, and always surprising.

This is not a NORMAL Christmas, because EVERY Christmas is a new Advent – a new beginning. A new possibility. An eruption of a volcano of love.

The peace of Christ be with you.