

By a Son

Year B, Proper 22 – Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, October 4, 2015

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets,” begins the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews, more of a treatise or an essay or a sermon, really, “but in these last days [God] has spoken to us by a Son.” In a word of encouragement to a congregation of new Christians, in a world where Christianity *itself* was just new, the writer to the Hebrews begins by laying out the concept and the parameters, and God’s *purpose* for the Incarnation, for God coming among us in the person of Jesus Christ.

One of the fundamental teachings of Scripture is that God is transcendent, far beyond our ability to grasp or conceive. Yet, “in these last days,” it is in a single human life, born in a stable in a Judean backwater village, that the Almighty Ruler of heaven and earth chooses to speak the plan for our salvation. The God who is all-powerful, who could, with a breath, destroy the world and begin again, will not. The God who could *enforce* our obedience by fiat or command, does not. The God who could speak with lightning and thunder and winds and fire, has not. Instead, God speaks to us by a Son. God sends his son to be cared for, protected, finally *heard* – by *us*. God sends his Son to live a lifetime of laughter and tears, of joy and pain, to speak to us in a way that we might finally understand. The eternal Word of God, the beginning and the end, the morning star who sang creation into being, came to be fully, completely, and very painfully human.

Summing up the entire divine conversation to that point, the unknown writer says that when God had spoken and spoken and spoken, by promises, and by laws, and by prophets, when the right time had come, God speaks to us one final word, by a Son. Just as it did for the writer’s first audience, it goes against all our powers of reason to imagine God as dependent. By very definition, God needs nothing and no *one*. God *is* the definition of *in*-dependent. And yet God’s final Word is spoken into the world like every one of us, dependent upon others for survival. The ruler of heaven is born not as a king, but as a child, a child who cries and laughs, a child who learns and grows, a child who is dependent upon others to feed him and care for him, a child who is dependent upon others for his very *life*. God’s final Word was vulnerable to hunger and thirst, to cold and stress, to infection and accident and treachery. If not for the shelter of a stable, if not for the softness of manger hay and the warmth of swaddling clothes, if not for Mary and Joseph and shepherds and sages, the final Word of God might have perished unspoken: “Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the merciful.” “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God *belongs*.” [hand] “Love God. Love each other.”

Anyone who doesn’t see the nonsense, the absurdity, the utter *scandal* of God’s final word to humanity arriving on the scene as a newborn *human* just hasn’t given it that much thought. And yet it is in the Incarnation, in the ridiculous improbability of God *become* human, in the coming of the Almighty in the fleshy vulnerability of a single human life, that God speaks the ultimate revelation of his purpose for us.

God’s final word, the writer says, is that God takes our salvation not only thoughtfully, not only seriously, but that God takes us *personally*. The Creator of heaven and earth takes it *personally* when we experience sorrow or rejection or oppression. The redeemer of all that is takes it *personally* when we suffer pain or fear or loss. The sustainer of universes takes it *personally* when, in the night of self-doubt and indecision we find ourselves in despair. The Ground of All Being takes it *personally* when we step from the path on which he leads us, when we allow cares and concerns to come between us. The Source of Light and Life takes it *personally* when, through ignorance or selfishness or pride, we deprive *others* of

the compassion and mercy and grace that we ourselves have so freely been given. The Lover of our Souls takes it *personally* when we turn our backs on his love, and when we turn our backs on one another. God's final word is that we ourselves are invited to share in God's hope for us. God's final word is that God so loved us – and loves us still – that he became *personally* involved in the fleshy vulnerability of *our* lives. By his *Son*, God has spoken to us *personally*. By his Son, God has spoken to *you*, and to *me*.

“In these last days,” the writer says, “[God] has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact *imprint* of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” That sounds awfully familiar, doesn't it?

We usually say it a little differently, don't we? “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. He suffered death and was buried. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.” The classic definition of the doctrine of the Incarnation was spelled out maybe two hundred, fifty years after an anonymous writer wrote to a group of sometimes confused, sometimes frightened, sometimes doubting young Christians trying to understand the meaning of the relationship that had given them hope and power and new life. But it comes down to the exact same thing. The transcendent, unknowable, independent Lord of all that is, seen and unseen, spoke to *us*, by *becoming* us.

“What are human beings that you are mindful of them,” the writer to Hebrews asks, “or mortals, that you care for them?” You have heard me say before that though God most certainly does not *need* us, all indication is that God *wants* us very much indeed. And so, we say we believe, “For *us* and for *our* salvation, he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became *incarnate* from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.”

“God has spoken,” the writer to the Hebrews begins, “by a Son.” And by *that* Word, we have *all* been saved.