

Sermon 2023 12 31 Text

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Companion on the Journey. Amen.

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Quite frequently our calendar is such that we have a couple of days of the Christmas Season and then we are off observing the Feast and Season of Epiphany.

This year is such that we have time for a First Sunday after Christmas – a time of reflection -- before we are drawn into the that time of proclamation. Recognising Jesus as the Christ and then becoming a community that proclaims Christ as Saviour and going into the world baptising in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

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“SECOND READING: Galatians 4.4-7

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.

And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.”

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“...born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law...” – that is the people of Israel; and “...born of a woman... so that we might receive adoption as children.”

If humanity had chosen to stop there, and if we had just all accepted that the salvation of Christ was for everyone we would have lived a life of peace and mutuality.

But humanity lives by exclusion, rather than inclusion.

First there were complaints about compliance. The dispute between the circumcision party and the non- circumcision party is clearly recorded in the New Testament. There too we disputes about leadership and the authority of that leadership. And to give some sense of authority these new “Christians” edited the Jewish Scriptures before accepting them and then began a vigorous writing campaign to be used in the same context, but in a post-birth of Jesus context.

And naturally, it took us three or four centuries, and the splintering of an intended whole group, into quite separate groups depending on what they wanted to believe. Then, a few centuries in we had to have Church Councils to work out statements about how we did and did not believe the “facts” about Jesus. We had a further dispute about the date of Easter which split an already crumbling “living together in harmony” into East and West – did the date really matter that much?

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In the Western Church, we had to have the Reformation. In 1517 Martin Luther nailed his 95 grievances with the Pope to the door of the Castle Church, Wittenberg, Germany, in 1517.

There were many other protestants.

In January 1533, Henry VIII wanted to marry Anne Boylen. So he separated the Church of England from the authority of the Pope.

This was followed by the formalisation of the 42 Articles of Religion in 1553 and the then editing of this document to become the 39 Articles in 1571.

And then of course the production of the King James Version of the Bible in 1611.

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And this whole preamble is a reflection of power and control within the church.

It is a proclamation that “we” whoever “we” are, are the sole interpreters of the truth about the child born in Bethlehem who came so that we could all live in love for one another in accordance with our creation and in accordance with our salvation by Christ.

But the custody of such a truth should never be left in the hands of humanity – for some will always attempt to use their version of the truth to limit and oppress the truth and love of others.

We celebrate the coming of the Christ Child in the midst of division, and not in unity and love.

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