

SERMON – SIR WE WOULD SEE JESUS

For the second week running I think I'm going to start with a confession. I confess to feelings of concern about the way all things covid has affected all of us. I confess to feelings of concern about the spirit of division in this nation and around the world. I confess that in the swirl of all our very understandable anxieties, I wonder whether the spirit of fear, is at times, causing us to lose sight of our own humanity, and the humanity of others. I confess I may be wrong about all these things. But my way of approaching this concern, is to do what scripture tells me to do. Truly! I "fix my eyes upon Jesus Christ, because Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith." *Hebrews 12:2*

And the reason why this is so fundamental, and relevant, to everything going on around us, is captured in the profound truth of today's 3 scripture passages.

So let's begin, by letting these words challenge you, in both their significance and their implications for your life, my life and today's world. Firstly, St Paul in Colossians ... **Christ is the image of the invisible God. 19 God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Christ.** In Hebrews ... **The Son is the reflection of God's glory and the exact IMPRINT of God's very being.** Listen to other translations to get the full impact. Jesus is **the exact representation of God's being. Jesus expresses the very character of God. Jesus perfectly mirrors the nature of God. Jesus radiates God's glory.** Now I think we can all agree that these are stunning words to grasp. But the most stunning of them all comes from Jesus Christ Himself in John's gospel. Frustrated at Phillip, his own disciple, and his failure to see what's in front of him, Jesus says ... "**Phillip why do you keep asking me to show you the father, when you've been with ME all this time.**" **Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father God!** This is without question, the boldest and the most significant claim Jesus made.

So how should this profound truth, both **challenge, and change**, every aspect of what we think it means to be human?

That in Jesus Christ, we can SEE and we can EXPERIENCE the exact imprint of God's very nature and being. That when we look at the life of Jesus, his teachings, all of His actions, all the ways he responds to different people...we are witnessing is the very nature of who God IS.

So how important is it, that we don't get a bit like Phillip? Jesus is in our midst revealing God to us, but we don't always see God's true nature. And when we do, maybe we don't always live this nature out. How important is it that we make that prayer at the back of our church central to who we are as people, and who we are as a church? 'Sir we would wish to see Jesus.' So as you look at Jesus Christ, what qualities do you see Jesus revealing to you, about the nature and character of God?

Well, let's pause for a moment and hear from our youth. Because Steph posed this very question to them in their weekly Zoom get together.

Never let it be said that we don't get our youth to chew over the big existential questions of life and faith. Listen to their responses.

YOUTH VIDEO

Good responses from our youth to one of the biggest questions we can ponder. So let's just spend a few minutes digging deeper into this big question. When you look at Jesus, what does Jesus show you about the kind of God we can not only experience, even more importantly, we can REFLECT back into the world? We can all be the Christ imprint. Because if there was ever a time for the way of Christ and the imprint of God's nature to be evident in the world, in this nation, truly it is for such a time as this.

I want to spend a few minutes on a meditation of 2 images we are blessed to have in our place of worship. Again, I want to celebrate again the creativity we are privileged to have in our church.

Because both these works of art provoke this profound question about the nature of God we see in Christ, and the divine imprint we are called to reflect in our lives. And its these two behind me. In the background the Triptych of the nativity scene. It was a gift from the Henton Family in 1960. They also set up a Trust for the benefit of the youth of this parish which enabled the building of the youth rooms.

Just behind me is a piece of stunning artwork created by a man called John Ewing. Now some of you will remember John and his wife Jenny. John is an American who in the 1960's was part of the animation team that created one of my all-time favourite films, Jungle Book. John and his wife Jenny now live in Orewa. What both these images give us, are pointers to the kind of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

The Nativity scene with Mary must surely reveal so much about the nature of God. After all, the entrance God chooses to make into His own creation, that the Word became flesh in the womb of a young unmarried Jewish girl, surrounded by animals, must tell us a deeply profound truth about the kind of God we can experience and serve.

The sculpture by John is another provocative reminder of the God we serve. We see countless images of Jesus on the Cross – or the cross by itself... but how often do we see this image? The broken body of Jesus being tenderly helped down from the Cross, moments after Jesus has spoken His powerful and enduring words ... **“Father forgive them for they know not what they do”**. So lets pause for a meditation. As you reflect on these images... what do they say to you about the nature and character of God? Remembering those words of Jesus... **I am in the Father and the Father is in ME. Anyone seeing me, is seeing the Father God.**” So what do you see of God in these images?

SHOW VIDEO

A few thoughts about what these images provoked in me about the nature of God that Christ reveals. The Christ child in the lap of mother Mary, reveals a God who makes an entrance into the world in the simple, the humble and the ordinary, but nurtured by love. A reminder that too often the human imprint is one of status, privilege and power that can diminish the way of love. The broken body of Christ lowered from the Cross, reveals a God whose imprint of love and forgiveness, is a greater than the human imprint of violence and vengeance? In Christ, **the radiance of God's glory, is self-giving, radically forgiving, co-suffering love**. In the tender love of mother and child juxtaposed with the brutality of the Cross, heaven and earth meet. And the divine imprint of God, is one of reconciliation and healing. What does all this have to say about the kind of calling for you and for me, to be the Christ imprint in the small details of our everyday lives? Particularly now.

Because this is the other profound implication of these scripture verses. That in Jesus Christ, the divine and the human become one. In Jesus, the great I AM-ness of God becomes something we can tangibly connect to our human experience. All our everyday trials and our testing's - all our deep sufferings and our deep joys - all our relationships with those we love AND those we find difficult to love... in and through Christ we have the light that illuminates the fullness and beauty of God's nature and ways. We are included in this divine imprint and divine calling. One of the early Church fathers and spiritual giants St Athanasius captured this in a sentence. **“God became human so that we might become more like God.**

I'll begin to conclude with a few final thoughts of how this call to be the Christ imprint, speaks into some of the challenges of our current situation.

Firstly, Jesus warned us to be careful about which spirit we allow to become our master. Where your treasure is, so will become you heart, said Jesus. In other words, be careful which groove you carve into your heart because it will become your imprint. Be careful what you mirror because this will become what you reflect.

Whatever our understandable anxieties we mustn't let the spirit of fear become our master. When the spirit of fear gets too big a grip on the human heart, we can begin to lose sight of our own humanity and the humanity of others. Fear can carve a groove in our hearts that can diminish us all.

Secondly, Jesus did reveal a God who will judge and as Evan said, Jesus rebukes. But the judgement was always about refining us to redeem us. Alerting us to HEAL us. Challenging us to change us. I haven't come into the world to condemn it, said Jesus... I've come to save and heal it. Jesus made a judgement on those who would judge others in the spirit of condemnation... to warn us that how we label and define others, will define the imprint **we become**.

And if the parable of the sheep and the goats tells us anything about the nature and character of God, it must be that the qualities of mercy, compassion and generous hospitality are central to what it means to be human with the divine imprint. God's nature in our human nature.

John Ewing Story to finish

I'll finish with this. Last week I received a phone call from Jenny Ewing, John's wife. She told me that John was now 93 and not surprisingly his health isn't quite what it used to be. She said that John keeps speaking about his artwork, particularly this one and she wondered if it would be alright to come over from Orewa and go into the church to spend some time with this sculpture. She said it would mean such a lot to John to see his creation again. I told Jenny that it would be our great privilege for John to see his work. So they both came over and observing all the covid protocols they went into the church and sat together, with this stunning piece of artwork. When they came out Jenny told me it had been a very moving time for John to see and spend time in the company of his creation. John asked me if people enjoyed this work. I said John "this your legacy for present and future generations to enjoy." I told him about the times we display his art on Good Friday and how so many people have commented to me personally on how it touches them in profound ways. It's enables them to see both the Cross and God from a different perspective.

When they left, I was left with an abiding thought for my own journey.

It struck me that what John had created his own Christ imprint to touch the lives of others and we can all do this too. We may not all be sculptors of brass artwork, but we can all sculpt something that reflects the image of God in the small details of our everyday existence. We can all sculpt the Christ qualities of compassion, mercy, truth and goodness. We can all create the shape of Christ in our everyday words, conversations and actions. As we move forward as a people, a nation and a Church, my prayer is that we as a St George's community reflect this fullness of God's good and just nature, in a world so desperately in need of this Christ imprint. **Sir that we would see Jesus.**

