

Advent Midweek 1

The Incarnation and the Kingdom of God ~ It Is Hidden

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Matthew 16:13-20

I once heard of a gentleman who was going to propose to his one, true love. The classic approach, dropping down on bended knee, professing that he'd be the happiest man alive if she would only say "yes" to his enticing request for her hand was eschewed for a more original design. He encased the engagement ring in an ice cube and asked the wait-staff at the restaurant where the couple was dining to insert the precious ice into her glass. The idea was that as the ice melted, she would observe the stunning piece of jewelry in her drink and the ingenious Romeo would then pop the question. What could go wrong? Have you ever put something in an unusual place on purpose, thinking to yourself, "I'll surely remember where I've put this thing because it is so unusual"? Later, you can't find what you want and curse yourself for not choosing the obvious, out-in-the-open location you always use.

Does God hide Himself? I showed the preschool children a manger today. I asked them if they knew what it was? One of the youngsters said that it was a crib, a cradle. Four-year-olds know that a manger has something to do with a baby, but they can't figure it out exactly. They knew the name of their school – Christ the King. They know that Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords (mostly because I told them). They know that a king lives in a castle or a palace, but where did Jesus choose to be born? Where was Jesus laid after he was born? Does God actively choose to hide Himself from the eyes of sinful man? When Jesus was crucified, humanity was divided. On one hand there were those who mocked Him, ridiculed Him, and heaped their bitter scorn upon Him. On the other hand, there were those who saw through His shame and embraced His majesty *in* His suffering. The centurion who oversaw Jesus' execution said this upon His death: "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54). A thief, dying by Jesus' side, prayed for entrance into Christ's kingdom. What did they see and how did they come to see it?

What did Simeon see as he held the infant King in his arms? Simeon was that old man who had been told that he wouldn't see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ (Luke 2:26). Simeon saw a baby. His cones and rods could perceive nothing more than a newborn Israelite child. Did Simeon see more? Did Simeon *know* that he saw more than what could be perceived with his eye-bones? Do you agree that the Kingdom of God was there *to be seen* in the infant Jesus? Do you agree that God wants you to find it where He has hidden it, that He hides it precisely so that you *might* find it. Do you believe that He hides His kingdom so that He might reveal it to you only by faith? It turns out that God doesn't particularly care for Goldman Sachs. God doesn't dig Madison Avenue or Wall Street or Hollywood Boulevard or any of the fancy places that sparkle and dance in the eyes of sinful man. God will not play our religious games. The wisdom and vanity of the world will not be God's M.O.

There are plenty of people who want a Goldman Sachs god – glittering with silver screen beauty and a cleft chin and a dope entourage and who kills it at the box office. Is that how you think the Kingdom of God comes? God crucified His Son. When Jesus hung on the cross it was as bad as you can imagine. It looked horrific because it was horrific. A man; the Son of God was a man –

real flesh, real blood, real bone. God Himself was vulnerable to our assault. It very much looked like evil won the day. If this was the Son of God He surely was vanquished, by the corrupt religious authorities, by an unjust civil power, by the demonic forces at work to subdue all that is good. That's what it looked like. The Almighty is the One who created the heavens and earth by the power of His Word. The Almighty crafted humanity in His own image and blessed them in paradise. Love was the catalyst for this creative burst. Giving; God gives and there is nothing that can stop this gesture, this love, this desire to give.

There is something hidden in the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth. True God inhabits that flesh (John 1:14). He is active, in that flesh, to give, to triumph, to redeem, and to recreate. Beneath His weakness is a power that rules the cosmos (Colossians 2:9). Beneath His shame is a glory that transforms the heart of man. He wants to you to find it. Faith finds it. Only faith finds it. He hides His glory so that He can save you by faith which is more enduring than your cones and rods, more trustworthy than your cones and rods and your reason. Hidden in the womb of Mary was the Kingdom of God which entered into this broken creation. Hidden in that infant, lying in the manger, was the eternal Logos, and the dominion of Him who is without beginning and without end. "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the Incarnate Deity."

God hides His Kingdom. But He tells you where to find it. Do you know what you call it when you look for God in a place where He has not promised to be found? You call it idolatry. It is the greatest of sins, worshipping false gods. It is the greatest of sins, casting aside God's good gifts for the world's religious slop. Pride is the progenitor of this sin. Boredom and vanity and rebellion and greed and hedonism – these character traits conjure up a god that stimulates the appetite of sinful man and the world falls down in worship to this golden idol. God rejects the world's wisdom. God won't play man's two-bit spiritual charade. "God choose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" (1 Corinthians 1:27-28).

Some folks didn't know what they were looking at. They'd seen a million different guys and this fellow didn't look any different. Just a guy; sure, He spoke with authority, but we know His mother and His brothers (Matthew 13:53-58). Just a guy; sure, He did some pretty amazing things, but look at Him, no golden sandals, no trademark line of clothing, and he doesn't consort with those in the halls of power. Peter knew what he was looking at. What about you? Who do you say that I am? Jesus asked His disciples. "Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'" (Matthew 16:15-16). It was hidden and Peter found it, just exactly as God intended. What do you suppose Peter's demeanor was when he found it, when he confessed it, when he received Christ's commendation of blessedness? Elation? Discovery that enriches the soul – isn't that your experience? Are you sure of it, what God has shown you? Look for Him where He had hidden Himself. Look for Him where He has promised to be found. It is His plan, His design. Nothing will go wrong with this design.

When our Lord was conceived, everything fell into place perfectly. When our Lord was born, it unfolded just exactly as He had planned it, eternal dominion laid in a manger, the exact opposite of the world's expectation. When our Lord died the blessed kingdom of God was unleashed.

Nothing can stop it. Faith finds it. God reveals it and faith most certainly finds it where it is hidden. Your eyes see it. I know they do. The world will perpetually look for something else, something its sinful palate craves. We cherish the revelation of God and embrace it as our own. It doesn't need tinsel, or gilding, or cultural gingerbread. God being hidden in the flesh of Christ is His *modus operandi*. The simple vessels of bread and wine are God's choice for His kingdom to come to you. The mortal eye only sees water poured on a child. Faith sees the blood of Christ and the power of His merit, the extension of His love, His kingdom. God has placed His kingdom in these sacraments and the church will never forget where it is found.