

Christmas Day Sermon - 2024

John 1:1-18

How would you summarise theology in one sentence?

The great Swiss Theologian Karl Barth was once asked to be a guest lecturer at the University of Chicago Divinity School. At the end of a captivating closing lecture, the president of the Seminary announced that Dr. Barth was not well and was quite tired. "Therefore, I will ask just one question on behalf of all of us." He turned to the renowned theologian and asked, "Of all the theological insights you have ever had, which do you consider to be the greatest of them all?"

"It was the perfect question for a man who had written literally tens of thousands of pages of some of the most sophisticated theology ever put into print. Karl Barth closed his tired eyes, and he thought for a minute, and then he half smiled, opened his eyes, and said to those young seminarians, "The greatest theological insight that I have ever had is this: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Karl Barth is right on the money, you really can't have a more profound theological insight than this; to know, to believe, and experience the Love of God in Christ Jesus.

St. John the Evangelist himself summarised theology in one verse that has arguably become the most famous bible verse of all time – John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life"

At Christmas, we celebrate the mystery of the incarnation, which means that, in Jesus, God took human flesh, lived a human life, and was fully one of us. St. Augustine pondering on the incarnation wrote.

"How much you have loved us, O God. If your word had not become flesh and had dwelt among us, we would have had to believe that there was no connection between God and humanity and we would have been in despair"

As we celebrate the birth of Christ the Lord today, let us consider three implications of God's love in Christ Jesus.

Firstly, because God loves us, we can access the Truth and True meaning of Life. We heard in our Gospel this morning that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" Here, Word means the complete, objective, logical, and rational reality of things – Logos in Greek. From time immemorial, God has sent messengers, spokespersons, prophets, philosophers, and religious leaders to speak about various aspects of the ultimate truth. Still, none of them had access to the complete Truth of God, because they were mere humans and not God. In fact, at times they have taught error.

Only Jesus Christ who is the Son of God, the Word of the Father, who has been with the Father from all eternity (from the beginning) has access to all the Truth that we need to know. Jesus says in John "I am the way, the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father except through me" John 14:6.

I was talking to a young man after our Carols Service last Sunday night, who was searching for the Truth in various religions and still not convinced about Christianity either. When asked what he thought the meaning/the truth about life is, he said 'It's what you make it' – All subjective meanings we give life apart from Christ, as many of our contemporaries entertain are far from the Truth of God. God's vision for humanity is fully expressed only in his Son Jesus Christ. Without God's truth, the life of our soul is in danger of death.

We rely on science which tells us the reality of things, verified by scientific methods, for our physical safety and survival in this world; similarly, we need to

rely on the Spiritual reality of things, given to us by Christ Jesus for the safety and survival of our souls in this life and the next.

So God's love for us means that we do not have to come up with our own meaning and purpose for life, neither are we just stardust void of real meaning and purpose, nor an accident on this planet, we are God's creation and he has given us his Word, his Truth, his Meaning, his Purpose, his vision, for our lives, in the Word Made Flesh – Jesus Christ our Lord.

Secondly, because God loves us in Jesus, we have access to his healing of Mind, Body, and Spirit – in a word his salvation. We were made by divine intelligence and we find our true Joy and happiness when we align ourselves with the divine plan for our lives.

However, we have all experienced the consequences of sin, when we have gone our own way and not followed God's ways, the pain and hurt we all experience due to our broken sinful human nature; the breakdown of relationships, heartbreaks, letdowns, challenges of sickness, the regrets, the anxiety of living in a troubled world with wars and natural disasters, they all have a toll on our psychological, Emotional, Social and Spiritual health. At times we wonder, why things have happened to us, the way they have... we cry - why me?

In his love for you and me, Jesus is interested in the status of our minds, hearts, and souls. He knows we all carry darkness within us, and the mess we carry. He likes coming to messy places and transforming darkness into light – that's why we call him a saviour – someone who saves.

We know that no matter how thick the physical darkness is at any given place, it cannot conquer the light of one little candle, all the darkness in the world, cannot

conquer the light of one simple little candle, So we invite the light of Jesus into whatever darkness or mess we have in our lives today. His light will conquer our darkness. As we heard in the Gospel – "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" It is only Jesus the True Light of life that can conquer the darkness of sin in our lives and heal us in mind, body and spirit – Only Jesus can help us live the best life possible in this world.

Finally, in his love for you and me, God has prepared a wonderful destiny for all of us, beyond this life. One of the early Church Fathers, St. Athanasius famously said (ca 298–373), in his massively influential work *On the Incarnation*. God became one of us so that we could be like God. This theological concept is called deification. What this means is that when we walk the path of faith, when we follow Jesus who is God-made-man, our Emmanuel, we are transformed into his likeness, and have the potential to share the very divine life of God, and participate in God's very nature.

St. John in the Gospel writes "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God."

We are made in the image and likeness of God, and we are on a journey to share the very life of God. The fullness of this state is called heaven. God came from his heaven to earth in Jesus so that we can go from earth to heaven, to be with him. "God became man that man might become God," – This is why every human life has immeasurable dignity and value because each person has the potential to share in the divine life; this is a uniquely Christian concept. Nothing that has happened in your life can take this wonderful gift from you, you are made for greatness and glory in God.

How are we to deepen in this gift of God offered in Christ? We are to say a big Yes to God, just like the Blessed Virgin said her Yes to God's plan for her

life, we are to say a Yes to God so that God's power can work in us and transform us into his likeness – for nothing is impossible with God.

We receive many gifts during this time, and God has blessed us with many gifts in life. Our very lives, families, friends, work, careers, food and drinks we have, our faith and parish to name a few. However, the greatest gift God wants to give us is, nothing else but – HIMSELF in JESUS. Ultimately our human heart is searching for God himself, and until we find him we will never be fully satisfied.

We are made by God for God. If we have God we have everything, if we have everything but do not have God, we have nothing. Our hearts will be restless until they rest in God – St. Augustine.

So let us renew our faith in God, Let us continue to search for him like the shepherds who came looking for baby Jesus, like the Magi who came following a star to Bethlehem, like John the Baptist who went into the wilderness to search for God, like the blessed virgin Mary who longed for the Child Jesus with love beyond all telling, and like countless ordinary men and women, who searched for God in faith and found him in Jesus, lets renew our faith, and invite Jesus to be born in our hearts this Christmas, so that we will experience his love for us, have access to his Truth, Salvation and be Convinced of our Divine Destiny that awaits us.