

God the Son

Yesterday Steve helped us to reflect on what it means to believe in God as Father, and today we move on to reflect on what believing in God as Son might mean for us.

At once we believe in a God who created all that is, who yearns for creation to be fulfilled – a God for whom the complexities of our created experience provide such rich material for philosophers;

and we also believe in a God who is utterly approachable, and to whom we are called to relate as ‘Abba’ – a God who by contrast is interested in our every action and thought, a God not measured by material effects, but revealed as total love.

It is bringing these visions of God together that is at the heart of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation – that in Jesus we find both the true human image of God.

It is this truth that we celebrate at Christmas as we read the beginning of John’s Gospel – where we proclaim that the Word of God became flesh in Jesus Christ and lived here as one of us. Here we have the proclamation that God is revealed fully and truly in the historical person of Jesus – that so far as we are able to perceive it, here is God. Of course our vision is still imperfect, but we can see the full glory of God in human form – first in the teaching of Jesus, then in the love that took him to the Cross and finally the hope for transformation that is revealed in the events of Easter Day.

But it is all too easy to stop at this point – to treat the revelation of God in Jesus as just that, the revelation of God to humanity – a one way journey. It is often overlooked that that passage from John’s gospel does not refer to the Father alone being revealed in Jesus – it refers to the Word being revealed in human form. If you listen carefully to that passage it is clear that (although the Father has no beginning or end) the Father only came into being in relation to the Word:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word was before the beginning, with God.

Those words slip by so quickly in the celebrations of Christmas that even the seasoned church-goer might miss the contradiction when we say that ‘the Word was with God’ in the same sentence as saying that ‘the Word is God’.

Perhaps we might think of this as similar to the inner voice that allows us to think, and be reasoned – that inner voice that means that we are made in the image of God, is a reflection of the inner voice that is at the heart of God – that inner voice that is the Word or wisdom of God. It is this wisdom that is made man in Jesus Christ – it is the very being of God that we see in Christ. All too often Christians fail to articulate this truth – focussing on the image of Father to Son in a way that tends to subordinate the human Jesus to the heavenly Father. But the truth of the Christian understanding is that God the Father and God the Son both, in two different ways reveal to us something of the truth of the one God. This also has to mean that we are no longer able to treat the revelation of God in Jesus as just the one way revelation of God us,

but also an event by which humanity is drawn into the experience of the Word – our experience becomes nothing less than the experience of the inner being of God.

Measured in conventional terms, the historical reality of Jesus seems like a tiny moment in history – a moment that, when set against the millions of years since the creation of the world, can have little impact. But this again places a limit on reality that stems from the time-bound nature of human perception. We line things up in a sequential order and perceive that every unit of time has equal value. But at the same time our experience of life suggests that time is relative in nature – that therefore that one life might have a significance beyond the mere 33 years by which we measure it. To understand this it might be worth calling to mind events in our life that stick out, that have an impact on our life that is much greater than the proportion of time that they took up. For me these include events such as the shame of my only school detention, the first suicide that I had to deal with and clear up, the birth of Ben, my ordination, a particular evensong in Windsor... In each of these the time that they took up bears no relation to the impact that they have had on me. And so it is with Jesus – the cosmic event of the incarnation has an impact that we can only glimpse as God is revealed to man, and the Word of God participates in human experience.

In this two-way revelation of God we find God writ in human terms. And we see this no better than in the coming days when we find God among us – God with us – as we experience the human, emotional tumult of those last days and see the gift of love giving all on the Cross and transforming all in the open, empty tomb. Then only one challenge is left to us – to open ourselves to that transformation and to allow ourselves to become more like Christ.
