

## **Christmas Eve Talk 2018 (DH)**

About 30 years ago I took my daughter – aged about 2 to our doctor's surgery where the practice nurse stabbed her twice in the arm with a needle. The dreaded jabs – inoculations against lots of different potentially dangerous illnesses.

My daughter didn't say anything. She was distraught. But written all over her face as she threw herself at me was 'how could you...??' She knew – we both knew – that although I hadn't stuck the needle in, I was responsible for the whole thing.

2 or 3 days later, injections mercifully a thing of the past, I was walking in town with her. She was trotting along quite happily by me when she saw the same practice nurse coming towards us: 'No – its that nasty witch – I'm not going there!' Mercifully we were able to step into a shop before she saw us.

All my daughter's reactions given what she knew and understood as an intelligent 2+ little girl – entirely understandable and logical.

You see, I hadn't and didn't offer her any explanation. There wasn't one she would understand. Which of course doesn't alter the fact that what I did was in her best interests and motivated by my love for her. That didn't make it any less painful for me either...

I tell you that story because I think in some ways it really highlights and demonstrates God's dilemma when He deals with me.

I am really very like my daughter was.

Because there's so much about life I don't understand . After all – why would I? (I wasn't around 100 years ago and I won't be around in 100 years from now. I realise in the grand scheme of things I'm very insignificant. Given that God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and that the magnificent creation we see is merely like his autograph, I do realise, in my more lucid and honest moments that I can't and won't understand much of what goes on in my own life – let alone what I see going on in the world around me, and there's no explanation that God can offer me that I will begin to understand.

I can also find myself regarding God as the equivalent of 'that nasty witch' - not surprising really. God knows that too.

But of course, we will probably all of heard it said at Sunday School maybe or somewhere else that God claims to be Love and loving in all His dealings with me – as I actually was, taking my daughter for her jabs.

So...let's suppose for one moment that it's true. He is God Almighty and He is entirely loving.

We do understand love – or even if we don't understand it, we do 'get' it. I'm talking real love here – not anything emotional or sentimental or romantic. I'm talking about caring. Caring enough to give, to do something to help, which is always costly. Real love is always costly. It always involves giving or giving something up. I'm thinking about getting up in the night to your child who's been sick for the third time, or being the main carer for a parent with dementia, or spending time with a friend with a drink problem – or issues with anger management. I'm thinking about the amazing stories we hear of - people who chose to risk or give up their life for others – going into burning buildings or out on stormy seas.

Those examples of love leave me feeling pretty churned up - uncomfortable, amazed, mind-blown humbled, and unworthy - grateful and actually wanting to be a better person myself...

Well, what God claims to do is to show me (and you and everyone else) in ways we can understand and get our heads round, what He's like – that He is entirely and utterly loving and entirely and utterly committed to you and me, and loving in all His dealings with us and that He wants a genuine meaningful relationship with us...

Which brings me to Christmas.

Quite simply that first Christmas God Almighty chooses to join the human race as a very ordinary man – or more accurately as the most extraordinary man ever, in order to identify with me/us/humankind. Jesus lives a life that shows in absolutely everything He says and does that He cares. He gives all his time and energies in showing and explaining and demonstrating God's love and then He gives His life ... He gives everything - He gives up everything....

He is simply saying 'do you see now what God is like...??'

That first Christmas God started to show me/us what He's truly like so I/ we will begin to understand, and 'get' it and stop treating Him like 'that nasty witch' who we want to avoid at all costs but more like a loving parent who actually does understand.

One of Jesus' names given Him at Christmas is Immanuel: 'God with us'. That's how God wants it to be. He wants to be with us simply because He cares. We all want to be with the people we care about. We get that. It makes sense. He wants you and me to be in a new and satisfying relationship with Him which is entirely built on His love for us.

So – for myself - I'm beginning to 'get' that God is love and that Jesus is 'God with us' and I'm living with those truths and trying to work them out in my life...

And now.....??? I don't have any more answers than I did before. In fact I probably have more questions. In my clearer moments I realise that the answers are simply beyond me. But what I can do is learn to trust in the loving God Who actually has the answers in Himself. In fact I can do what my daughter did all those years ago and throw myself at God with all my frustrations, confusion, and anger and let Him help me and comfort me and reassure me.

Because to actually 'get' Christmas – is to understand that it's all about God's love shown to us in Jesus Christ. That Jesus is simply 'God with us' - God on your side, not to check up on you, or tell you off or say tut-tut, but to encourage you, guide you, comfort you, always be there for you because He really understands every single thing about us and the frustrations and disappointments of our lives – He cares and he always will.

That first Christmas was really the ultimate Christmas gift. God offering us His love. God coming to be with us. God committing Himself to us. God does not force Himself on us. His love for us is offered as a free gift.

But of course for any gift to be of any benefit to you or me it has to be received, unwrapped and used.

As we prepare now to come to Communion we can begin to do just that.