

On Friday I went for a walk in the lovely sunshine – there was almost a hint of spring in the air. While it was lovely walking, there were lots of puddles to be avoided. As I was walking down a narrow part of the ash felt path, I came across a dad walking with his two year old daughter. Dad, like I, was sticking to the dry path, his daughter however was walking beside the path enjoying walking through a muddy puddle in her wellington boots and looking for worms with a stick she had collected. Just as we passed, the girl stepped onto the path and started tapping her stick beside a large crack in the path, ‘hello, hello’ she called out ‘is anyone at home?’ Underneath my facemask I had a huge smile. What a wonderful way to see and delight in the world. While the adults around her walked carefully in masks around the puddles in the drying paths, she enjoyed the wonder of her surroundings and tried to meet worms or whoever lives in the cracks in the road after too much rain.

Delight, wonder and awe are such wonderful gifts which so often we miss as adults. So often we walk over cracks in the path not even noticing they are there, rather than wondering about who might be living within, and be up for a chat.

Today we hear again, as we did on Christmas Day, the opening verses of John’s Gospel, often referred to as the prologue to John. It is a beautiful piece of writing filled with delight, wonder and awe at all that God has done, if only we are open to see it. This passage was the first passage I remember ever being invited to read aloud in church. I was a teenager, and I remember loving the shape of the words. At the time, I wanted to be a vet or a poet, and I thought this passage was amazing – though I doubt I really understood it. But what I did get from it then, and what has remained with me throughout my life, is the beauty and shape of the words, and the absolute promise embedded in these words that God is with us, that God has been here since the beginning of time, and that God is doing something spectacular!

John’s Gospel is complicated, John writes with lots of imagery and rarely seems to tell a story straight to the point. But John is not just trying to tell us a story, he is trying to explain how Christ connects us to God. John doesn’t begin the Gospel with the story of how Jesus is born to Mary, rather he begins with a meditation on the Word of God made flesh. John is in a sense re-writing a new beginning to the story of the people of God. Some commentators describe this as the writing a new Genesis, a new story of God’s interaction with humanity that is every bit as important, and perhaps more, than the original. For according to John, Jesus is God’s reinvention and renewal of the whole creation and, indeed, of God’s own self, as God comes to make manifest God’s enduring commitment to, and love for, the world in and through ordinary human flesh<sup>1</sup>. That is God becomes human that we might see that we too have a responsibility for all that has been created.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/12/christmas-eveday-a-christmas-beginnings/>

These words are not only beautiful poetry, they are words of hope, like the signs of life after a storm, they are a promise that God is with us – not as a glib retort but in toiling in our midst way.

The clearest of John's theological promises is that "The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us". This primordial Word, which started with God and was a partner in creation has now become human. I was really helped by theologian Karoline Lewis about this, who points out that while the NRSV translates the verse, "and lived among us" the verb here is *skenoo*, "to tent" or "to tabernacle." Most of us will be familiar with the translation "and dwelt among us" but the verb can also be translated, "took up residence" or as Eugene Peterson's translates in *The Message*, "moved into the neighbourhood."<sup>2</sup>

This becomes even more important as the story of Jesus progresses, and with Jesus resurrection and the arrival of the Holy Spirit. A permanent reminder that God is dwelling in and with us. (This is why we also hear today readings from Proverbs and Colossians. They remind us of the promise. One of the images used in the Hebrew text to describe the presence of God is that of wisdom, this image is built on by Paul in the letter to the Colossians. As God's wisdom, the Messiah, Christ encompasses all reality – all that is seen and unseen – and it is this which come and resides with us<sup>3</sup>. )

In the context of the story of the biblical text, the dwelling of God is a deeply intimate, personal claim and assumes God's commitment to and continuity with God's people. Moreover, in the Word made flesh and dwelling among us, now God not only goes where God's people go, but is who they are.

So what do we do with image – with the gift of this poetry and wonder? How do we allow it to inform how we live each day?

Over the past weeks I have been watching, as I am sure many of you have *A Perfect Planet* – I have been really enjoying the amazing beauty and wonder of God's creation, but also how it documents our interconnectedness. How the actions of one part of the world's ecosystem impacts on another; and how we value in real terms these resources. If God is part of who we are, then every time we damage our environment or hurt each other, indeed we are damaging God as well.

The David Attenborough series as well as showing us the wonder and beauty of the natural world also invites us to consider how we live; the choices we make. And for those of us who live in urban disposable driven cities like London, this is especially relevant to us. It is too easy to blame others for this, but if our faith and the incarnation of Christ means anything to us, how we care for all God's creation in our

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/christmas-day-nativity-of-our-lord-iii/commentary-on-john-11-14-4>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/ordinary-16-3/commentary-on-colossians-115-28-4>

daily choices needs to be foremost in our minds. From how much plastic we are using, to the energy we consume, to where we source that energy from – all these things impact on the interconnectedness. We are bound together with each other and God, not just in faith but also in action.

We are in the privileged position of having choices about the way we live, the products we buy, the way we use power. Many do not have those choices, and so we need to be careful to ensure that change begins with us. The place to start is remembering the wonder and awe of all that is around and within; and allowing that to inform how we choose.

The Pandemic has raised many social and political issues for us all, but more than anything it highlights how we are all connected – how our behaviour and choices impacts not only on our family and neighbours – but on the wider community and even global community.

As I have contemplated this image of the wisdom and indwelling of God within each of us, and the connection this creates with all creation, I have been draw back again and again to the words of the Breast Plate of St Patrick. We are bound to God, who is in us, around us, before and behind us. We are bound to God who invites us to live mindfully noticing how our behaviour impacts on each other and all creation. We are bound to God who invites to hold onto the wonder and poetry of the beginning, making it a reality today. Amen.