

St Peter's, Ealing
Christmas Day
Saturday 25th December 2021

God is love, and those who live in love live in God and God lives in them.

(1 John 4.16)

'God is love, and those who live in love live in God and God lives in them. (1 John 4.16). This is the opening statement, taken from scripture, read at the beginning of the Anglican marriage ceremony. It is a powerful statement which defines God's relationship with us and the nature of a fulfilled life. It is a sentence that seems very full and complete, rounded and meaningful. It offers a strong framework for understanding the relationship God wants to have with us and thereby we can have with God. From this understanding comes a foundation for every relationship. In the context in which this sentence is commonly used, the context of a marital relationship – two people become one flesh, we change our being and, in this union, a mystical understanding of our relationship to each other envelopes us.

In this sentence we have the very kernel of the scriptural message. It may not always look like it but when we dig deep into the story of salvation this is what God wants us to understand. God only wants a loving relationship with creation, the very core of salvation. Throughout scripture God is constantly drawing God's people back into a meaningful and loving relationship with God.

In the Christian tradition, we begin today the ultimate in love stories. When we are in love we make ourselves vulnerable. In any successful marriage both parties should be able to allow themselves to be vulnerable. It is in our vulnerability we share who we truly are. In a loving, meaningful relationship we need to be able to share who we are in all honesty and truth. That level of openness leads inevitably to vulnerability. The lovers then, in that situation, don't take advantage of the vulnerability; they hold it, protect it and share it with themselves and their own vulnerability.

Here today in our story from the bible we have a deep and meaningful love story, one where vulnerability and relationship are key to the meaning of the story. This is the story of a child, born to a young couple, upon whom or in

whom the human understanding of the universe is drawn together, where the salvation of creation draws its meaning. Here in this stable a humble, some might even suggest a tragic scene begins to unfold. Here love begins to be defined in its most profound form. How else could this story of salvation have its meaning?

God is love. In a manger love is held. In this humbling human scene God is defined not by the limitations of materialism but the vastness of the cosmos. At this one small pin prick of a point heaven and earth meet and love has drawn them together.

Those who live in love. In this manger, humanity and divinity are brought together in a defenceless child. In this desperate scene we have the length, breadth, height and very depth of divine love poured out for the whole of creation.

Live in God. Here, in God, love is made complete. This is love that forgives all and heals all, love that unites and fulfils all. This is love in its purest, most vulnerable and most generous form. This love comes to live in us, asking us to live in him. When we are broken, sad or lost here is that love that if we allow it will bind us, fill us with hope and grace, it will find us and bring us home.

And God lives in them. This then must be the very core of the Christmas message. The love, made real in the Christ child, born of Mary, in a stable in Bethlehem, breaks through all barriers and puts God at the centre of our being.

In the stable love is born; fragile, vulnerable and defenceless. This is how much the God of the Universe loves us. Love, the very power God gave itself over to us. All love asks is we receive him.

God is love, and those who love in love live in God and God lives in them.