

Sunday 30 January 2022

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany



Sermon © the Revd Amy-Elizabeth Sheridan

Bible reading © the publishers of the NRSV translation.

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Introduction and welcome

Father, may these spoken words be faithful to the written word and lead us to the living word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I decided after Christmas Day that I would leave my Christmas tree up until Candlemas or also known as the presentation of Christ in the temple. That is the feast coming up on this Wednesday and the Gospel reading set for today is the same that is read then. That means I will sadly pack up my tree and miss the twinkly lights until December. I have some tree decorations that I love which are the twelve days of Christmas, and I as I was looking at them yesterday I held the two turtle doves in my hand and thought of today. You see two turtle doves were all that Joseph and Mary could afford to bring as their offering in the temple as they brought their son.

In the book of Leviticus it states that 'If she cannot afford a sheep, she shall take two turtle-doves or two pigeons ...' So here Mary and Joseph bring the two turtle-doves. But in reality they were bringing so much more. Mary offered up in her arms her Son the one who would be sacrificed for the whole world, who will bring heaven and earth together for always. As Mary lifted Him up to Simeon, so we feel the echos of His last hours on earth as He would be lifted up in front of all on the cross—the lamb of God who takes away the Sins of the world.

The words spoken over Jesus linger here too for Mary 'that a sword will pierce your very own soul too.' The deep heart stopping feeling of grief that would be coming her way through her act of offering up her Son. Yet Mary still chooses yes, a yes of love, a deep faith and hope and promise that only God can provide.

And our other two people in the Gospel scene, Anna and Simeon, who have been waiting for this moment for their whole lives. They hadn't had the chorus of angels, or a star to follow, no magi to hear from, they just had this deep faith and hope and promise that the Lord's Messiah would be revealed. They had the hope of love deep within their hearts.

As we hear in the letter to the Corinthians about love,

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

For most of us love is the only thing we can offer, like Mary and Joseph who could only bring the minimum required of them, we remember that all that is required by us is to offer our love to Jesus, offer our love to our neighbour, to offer love as the first thing in our thoughts.

Choosing to make love the first thing we do is challenging, especially if we are angry and hurt, Jesus calls us to love because He is love and we see His love revealed to all in the Gospel today, He is a light of revelation to the gentiles - us! Everyone! Not just a select few, not just inside the walls here today but everyone, so we must do likewise, we carry the heart of Jesus with us in all that we do.

The world needs love, it needs it so much, and we need each other in communion with each other, surrounded in the love of He who gathers us all like a hen gathers her chicks.

As we see and feel the lighter mornings creep into each day, let us cling onto the love that we offer to our Lord, who shines brighter than any decoration, He is the light in our hearts which guides us through even the darkest days. Today offer your own hearts afresh to He who loves us, who loves and longs for you so much. Amen.