

A sermon for Christmas Day 2020 based on John 1 preached at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand by Kerry Enright.

The early Christians were thought to be atheists because they did not believe in the Roman god. There are gods in which I do not believe. I do not believe in a god who controls everything that happens, a puppet-master moving people and pieces around. I do not believe in a god that sits remotely in a place far away called heaven. I do not believe in a god who arranges life to fit around us and our wants.

I do want to take up some of John's imagery, not as a formula but as an invitation to life. I want to speak of three persona or faces of God.

The first persona, or the first face of God.

I wonder if you have seen Mike's snowy Dunedin Christmas display, reminiscent of the north of North America in winter. It is a bit like those displays that help us know where the features of a region are. On a display of the topography of the Mackenzie Country, you might press a button that says Mount Aoraki, and a light comes on so you see where it is located. We press the button and the light appears. If we turned the board over, we would see the wires that ran underneath the board, connecting the power and the lights together. I would like us to hold that image in our minds.

The presence of God in the world has a pattern, involves a series of connections, a bit like a mosaic that is underneath and beneath everything that exists. On the surface, there seems little order. Events are random. We are frequently surprised by the unexpected. Lights shine here and there with no evident pattern.

But if I was, somehow, to turn over the full extent of creation and human experience, to look on the underside of the whole of life, to see the disparate pieces together but from underneath, I might see a vague outline, or even an outline that had parts missing and parts broken, but still some kind of pattern, a pattern that would be the effect of love, the power of love.

I would see billions of small and large acts of love that somehow generated more than we imagined. Like lights on a board that shine randomly. I might sense that those acts had had their source in a cosmic light-bearer, a lover, who gives life and love and meaning.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came into being through God and without God not one thing came into being. What has come into being in God was life and the life was the light of all people."

And now the second face.

This lover does not stay distant from us and uninvolved. The power of love was such that the lover had a beloved, a creation and creatures, so loved that the lover God would be fully "with-us", and

with us in our creatureliness, our humanness. God came in the other, the Christ, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, who was immersed, baptised, plunged into all our experience. “The Word became flesh and lived among us.” God came to Mary and through Mary came as the Christ, a vulnerable, susceptible child who needed a mother’s milk and parental care. There is a God who knows us, a constant companion, a conversation partner, the one who breaks bread with us, who walks life’s journey with us, who endures our suffering, whose life keeps breaking forth in impossible circumstances.

In the tough times of COVID, many people have found hope, and known love, and experienced a joy that is more than happiness. “To all who received God, who believed in God’s name, God gave power to become children of God, who were born of God.” As people bear the image of God, so they can be born of God.

The story of Christmas is the story of the lover and the loved.

And the third face, the third persona of God, is love itself, unrestrained, unlimited, reckless, fiery and untameable love. Spirit who blows through every fence we erect, across every field we try to border, into every person, every community, every nation, no matter how hard we try to stop that love. This light of love cannot be snuffed out and cannot be hidden and cannot be locked away. “What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.”

The God John portrays is points to a God who is lover, a God who is loved, and a God who is love itself. The God who is more than us, the God who is with us, and the God who is free of us in order to be free for everyone. Beyond, beside, among. All praise be to God, the God of Jesus.

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made known in Jesus, given in grace***



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