

## Stepping into the Mess

MJCF 2020年12月20日

Matthew 1:18-25, (John 1:14)

Merry Christmas! Out of love for us, God gave us Jesus, the one who came as a baby, the one who, as an adult, preached, taught, and healed, the one who died on the cross so that we could be forgiven all our sin and have a good relationship with God. Now, all we need to do is confess that we can't be good on our own power, believe in Jesus, and accept the forgiveness made possible through his sacrifice. Through Jesus, we are headed for eternal life in heaven, with our loving Creator, God. We are also empowered to share God's love with others.

Today, we read Matthew's account of Jesus' birth. The Angel tells Joseph that Jesus will save his people from their sins. We also read that Jesus will be called "Emmanuel", which means 'God is with us.'" Jesus is more than just a man. Many people think he was just a prophet who taught about God. But, Jesus himself told his disciples, "If you know me, you will know my Father also." He's talking about God, the "Father." Jesus also said, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."

The letter to the Hebrews begins in this way: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflections of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs" (Hebrews 1:1-4). God was in Jesus.

In John's account of Jesus' life, he begins with a poetic intro, describing Jesus as being with God from before the world was created. Here, John describes Jesus as the Word of God. The prophets spoke God's words to the people, but when Jesus came, God was giving THE Word to us. In John 1:14 it says, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us..." Instead of relaying a message through a human prophet, God came to us in Jesus! That's the incredible thing that makes faith in Jesus different from any other religion. Most religions emphasise ways we can work hard in order to reach a high level of happiness, or ways we can reach God. Christianity is the only faith that emphasises God coming down to our level, to become a human being. That's what we celebrate at Christmas. Every word that Jesus spoke can be understood as God's words to us. Jesus was both human and divine, so as we see how Jesus lived we have an example that we can follow.

Just think about what God was doing when God came to earth in Jesus! Jesus came from heaven. He had infinite power, and was beyond time. He came to earth and took on flesh, becoming a baby! The infinite became finite in a human body, a body that could feel pain, a body that could feel the discomfort of poopy diapers! Jesus was born into a poor family. According to Luke's account, he was born in a stable because there was no room for them in an inn. If they had been rich, they would have had fancy accommodation elsewhere. If we continue reading Matthew's account, we have the story of King Herod's attempt to kill Jesus by ordering all the area babies killed. Mary and Joseph have to take Jesus and run to Egypt, where they are refugees, until it is safe to return. The Christmas story is one of God stepping into the mess of our broken, violent, and polluted world.

God knows that we could not fix our problems on our own. If God would have just come and done some massive miracles to solve all our problems, the result for us would be fear. All people would become followers out of fear. Instead, we see God coming with love. The love of God is seen in that God stepped into our mess. In fact, the most amazing thing is that Jesus

allowed himself to be executed on a cross. This is not what anyone expected from someone who was perfect. This is not what you'd expect from an all-powerful God, but that's just how much God loves us.

Jesus commanded his disciples, saying, "love one another as I have loved you." The greatest commandment is to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves. That means resisting the temptation to focus only on ourselves. That means stepping into the mess of other people's lives, in order to give care for others.

Many years ago, my mother sensed God's leading, and stepped into a dangerous situation. She writes about the experience in an article for "Purpose" magazine. I'll read that for you, now.

Awaking from a dead sleep, I fumbled for the phone. "Doreen, can someone come over? Matt is in the basement with a loaded gun; says he's going to shoot himself." It was Jen, our neighbor across the shared driveway that separated our houses. Our back doors faced each other. I knew that she and Matt had been having marriage problems. With Matt's nonchalance and Jen's sharp tongue that wasn't surprising. But this bad?

I'm afraid of guns. I didn't grow up with handguns. Bullets can go astray. A confused person might change his mind about whom he's going to shoot. I wanted to say, "It's late. I'm in bed. Why don't you call the police? This is a dangerous situation. What can I do?" But I knew that simply the sight of a police uniform can trigger a negative reaction in a distraught person.

There was also an inner voice that argued with me. You've been telling Jen that God loves her and that God answers prayer. Do you really believe this? If you believe it, why are you afraid to go? You know God sent you to live in this neighbourhood for a purpose. How can you invite others to faith, if your own faith crumbles in crisis?

Praying desperately, I forced myself awake and into my clothes. Hugo was extra groggy after an exhausting day, but would pray. We couldn't both go. Someone had to stay with the children.

All too soon I found myself at their door, heart pounding — though somewhere in the depth of my being there was a God-given peace. After all, wasn't this what our ministry was all about?

God had also been at work next door. Jen greeted me: "I think things are better now. I grabbed the gun and smashed it as best I could."

After a brief conversation with Matt, who was feeling a bit sheepish, we all sat around the kitchen table over a cup of tea. I never discovered what the specifics of the quarrel were, but I did learn a lesson about the effectiveness of my faith. How easy it is to say the words. Living them is another matter. James puts it this way: "...faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by actions, is dead" (James 2:17 NIV). Come to think of it, that is exactly what my parents taught — and lived.

Jesus stepped into our mess. We are also called to step into the mess of others, sharing God's love and care. It's not easy. I like my life to be safe and predictable. I confess that I would rather just stay quiet, in my comfortable space, than step out and talk with someone who may challenge me, or make me uncomfortable. But, Jesus stepped out of heaven to come to our messed up world and become a vulnerable baby. As an adult, he was hung on a cross. Are we ready to take a risk and step out from our sheltered lives in order to follow where God may be leading? It takes faith. Do we trust that God will lead and take care of us no matter what? Our risk might only be small. We may be embarrassed or hurt. But, if we step out in love, God, who is the source of all love will lead us. Let's pray.

Loving God, thank-you for coming to live with us. We celebrate this incredible event. O Lord, we confess that there are times we've stayed in our comfort zone rather than following your lead and stepping out in faith. We confess that it's easy to run to our own comfortable space. We have not loved others as you have loved us. Forgive us for the times we've been focused only on our own situations. Fill us with your love, we pray, that it may overflow to those around us. Grant us the courage to step into uncomfortable situations in order to care for others, as your Spirit leads. We pray these things through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.