

All of us have moments in our life when we experience such goodness or beauty that we are filled with joy and grateful to be alive.

illus: I want you to think of a place you've been—here in Vancouver, in Canada, or another country in the world—where you encountered a beauty that led you to gratitude or praise. Where were you? What did you see? How did it make you feel?

In the Fall of 1993, on a crisp October evening, a group of my fellow classmates drove from Regina, Saskatchewan, to nearby Lumsden. We parked beside an old country church, spread out some blankets, and broke out the hot chocolate.

I was born and raised in B.C.—I'm a Lower Mainlander—I know mountains, ocean, rain, and the occasional spot of sun. But I didn't know skies until I lived in Saskatchewan, and I didn't know lights until that evening in Lumsden.

We had gone expecting to see stars, but what we encountered was a stunning display of the Northern Lights—the sky began to dance, to pulsate, with greens, purples, and pinks. This is a good and beautiful world in which we live—that night I was overwhelmed by beauty and joy; I found myself thinking, *“What a wonderful world God has made!”*

Now I want you to think of a moment where you encountered goodness, kindness, or love—it might have been something you saw or heard, it might have been something you received from a parent, grandparent, teacher, or friend. What was the circumstance? What did you see or receive? How did it make you feel?

illus: After graduating from Bible School, I was hired by a church in Calgary. I was 24, single, and had nothing in my bank account; to make matters worse, I couldn't afford to rent anything based on what I was being paid.

One of the couples in the church, Bob and Sandi, knowing my situation, took me into their home—they did more than give me a place to live, I became a part of their family. I was a part of every family dinner, every birthday party; their family celebrated my birthday as if it were one of their own. When Naomi and I got married, she became a part of the family too; when Luke was born, Grandpa Bob and Grandma Sandi added one more grandchild to the list. I was included, honoured, cherished, and loved—so was my family.

When I look back at the 9 years I spent in Calgary, and all of the goodness that I encountered, much of it was tied to the unexpected experience of family that we were invited into. This world that God has made can be a wonderful place.

Every year, during the season of Advent, we turn our attention to the birth of Jesus, celebrating the truth that God became human. My intention is that we would spend these Advent weeks exploring the theology and implications of the incarnation.

In the Incarnation we celebrate the truth that God the Son—Co-Eternal, Co-Equal, with the Father and the Spirit—became human without ceasing to be God. If we want to know who God is and what He's like, we look to Jesus. In John 12:45 Jesus said, *“The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me;”* in John 14:9 Jesus said, *“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”*

In the past God had spoken, revealing Himself to the world, at various times, through various prophets, but when God the Son became human, the world received the final, ultimate, decisive word about God. And it's fair to say that when God became human, the world received more than simply a revelation of who God is—in becoming human, God revealed what He thinks about the world.

John 3:16-17 says, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

Why did God the Son become human? *Because He loves the world.* Why does He love the world? Because God still considers the world to be a good and beautiful place, a place worth renewing and restoring—God became human because He believed humanity was worth saving.

I began my sermon with an exercise in remembrance—we called to mind a place, and a moment, in which we experienced beauty and goodness in this world. Implicit in the Incarnation is God's affirmation of the goodness of creation. This morning I want to open the Bible with you and begin to explore this theme—in the incarnation we hear God's “Yes!” to humanity, and we are given an example of how to relate to God, one another, and to the world.

If you have a Bible, smart phone, or tablet with you, let me encourage you to turn with me to Genesis 1—if you are using the

Blue Bible, located in the seat rack in front of you, you can find our text on page 1.

1. A Good Creator = A Good Creation: The creation account in Genesis 1 is a proclamation of good news. In the first five days of creation we read that God looked at what He had made and *“He saw that it was good.”* God takes great joy in, He delights in, what He has made—there is so much beauty, artistry, and awe-inspiring-wonder, all around us. A fresh snowfall on the mountains, a sunset on the prairies, an ocean so blue, so clear, that even 50 feet down you can see fish of every size, shape, and colour. All beauty finds its origin in God.

On the sixth day of creation, after creating humanity in His own image, *“God saw all that he had made, and it was **very good.**”*¹ There is something of God that is reflected by humanity—we have been made in His image and likeness.

The creation account is a proclamation of good news, but as you well know, it's not always obvious that the world is a good place, or, that human beings are themselves good. How do we reconcile God's declaration of *“**very good,**”* with things like genocide, poverty, famine, or war? The short answer is, we don't. Genesis 1 reminds us that whatever has gone wrong with our world or with us, doesn't have its origins in God.

When humanity turned away from God, the Giver of Life, destruction and death entered the world. There are those who describe the world as dark and almost devoid of God—they say that

¹ Genesis 1:31

the image of God in humanity has all but disappeared, but this is not the message of the Bible. Yes, sin has seriously effected our ability to reflect and represent God, but His image has not been erased, and His claim upon us and the world still remains.

So where does this leave us? Humanity is in need, certainly, but not without hope. God became human because He loves the world. He loves the world because He still considers humanity worthy of rescue and restoration. In truth, by becoming human, God the Son bestowed dignity and glory upon humanity. One 4th century Christian theologian put it this way,

[He was not] defiled by being in the body. Rather, He sanctified the body by being in it...Just as the sun is not defiled by the contact of its rays with earthly objects, but rather enlightens and purifies them, so He who made the sun is not defiled by being made known in a body, but rather the body is cleansed and quickened by His indwelling.²

The Incarnation is God's "Yes!" to humanity and has profound implications for our embodied existence.

2. Implications for an Embodied Existence: Let's begin with Jesus' death and resurrection. When Jesus was raised from the dead, in one sense, His resurrected body was just like ours—His body still bore the marks of the nails, He could be touched, and was able to eat fish; clearly Jesus was no phantom.

² Athanasius, *On The Incarnation*, 46.

³ Gerrit Dawson, *Jesus Ascended: The Meaning Of Christ's Continuing Incarnation*, 7.

Much of the Christian conversation surrounding life after death doesn't align with the resurrected, embodied, Jesus. Many describe heaven as a non-material place and imagine they will be like the angels, pure spirits, without a body. The resurrection of Jesus pours a bucket of cold water on such thinking. Jesus hasn't shed His humanity like an old, smelly, cloak—He was raised to a new *embodied* life and forever remains God-in-the-flesh. When we meet Jesus face to face one day, it will be human hands that embrace us.³

Because Jesus remains fully human, because He has bestowed dignity and honour upon our embodied existence, we cannot separate body and soul—both belong to Him. The Bible teaches that there is something sacred, set apart, holy about our bodies. Made as we are by God, He has designed our bodies with purpose; to contravene this purpose is to hold both God, and ourselves, in contempt.

And so, what you do to your body matters; how I use my body matters. In fact, how we honour God with our bodies is as much a part of our worship as what we think and desire. How we treat our own body, or the bodies of others, makes a huge statement about what we think of God as Creator.

What I've just articulated flies in the face of the way our current culture thinks about an embodied existence. In our current culture "*my right to decide*" supersedes almost every notion of the sanctity of the body. *This is my body, and I get to decide what happens to it, and what I do with it.* This kind of thinking is rampant, inside and

outside of the church; in the end, this way of thinking inevitably leads to a dishonouring of what God has made.

If the body doesn't matter, if it's mine to do with as I please, then when surrounded by pain, why wouldn't I drink or smoke myself into oblivion? If the body doesn't matter, if it's mine to do with as I please, and if it makes me feel better, why wouldn't I try eat away my insecurities and disappointments? If the body doesn't matter, if it's mine to do with as I please, then how, when, and with whom I express my sexuality is entirely up to me.

A prevailing thought in our culture is that as long as I'm bringing no harm to you, and I can do what I want to myself. But can we misuse our own body without it affecting others? Every day, hundreds if not thousands of Canadian Hospital beds are occupied by people who have abused their own bodies—drugs, food, sex, alcohol, overwork. Each year hundreds of millions of dollars are spent treating the consequences of this misuse—it doesn't just affect the person, it affects families, neighbourhoods, cities, and our national economy.

The abortion legislation, the current “right to die” legislation is pushing the idea that “*my right to decide*” supersedes the sanctity of the body. This kind of thinking reveals an utter disregard for the Creator—if there is no Creator, I can do as I please with my body.

In 1 Corinthians 6:12 and following, the Apostle Paul addresses these attitudes by pointing to Incarnation and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. “**12** *“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial...The body, however, is not meant for sexual*

immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also... 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? ...19 Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies.”

In a biblical way of thinking, we do not “exist” in this life, we “partake” of God's life—all life is tied to Him.⁴ The Incarnation has massive implications for how we think about sexual expression or sexual exploitation, for safe working conditions, for euthanasia and abortion, for how we take care of the poor/widow/and orphan, and for how we come along side those who deal with mental or physical challenges.

Let's move on and briefly talk about the implications of the Incarnation for equality.

3. Implications for Equality: In order to understand equality, we need to begin with the God who has revealed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the Trinity we have unity, diversity, harmony, and equality, but we do not have hierarchy.

In creation, God created humanity—*male and female He created them*—and He co-commissioned them to steward creation. But when Adam and Eve broke relationship with God, something broke between them. Instead of unity, diversity, harmony, and equality, division and inequality was born.

⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Scandal Of The Incarnation: Irenaeus Against The Heresies*, 95.

This division and inequality can still be seen—between men and women, young and old, the poor and rich, and between ethnic groups. In part, it was this very division and inequality that was addressed when God the Son became human.

Galatians 3:26-28 says, “*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*”

Paul isn’t saying that faith in Christ eradicates all distinctions. After becoming a Christian, a man is still a man, a woman is still a woman, a Filipino is still a Filipino, and our economic status remains the same. Paul isn’t saying that these distinctions are no longer real—he’s saying something much more radical. He’s saying that in Christ, in the Church, these distinctions are stripped of their power to divide us.

We’ve all been made in God’s image, we all stand in our need before God, and we’re all loved by God—our common humanity is bound together in the humanity of Jesus. In the incarnation, Jesus takes our common humanity, sanctifies it, and then gives it back to us.

When we become Christians, He becomes our primary identity marker—our economic status, our gender, our ethnicity, our job, our family, our education, all of these things become secondary. What Paul is saying is so radical that few of us get it, believe it, or live it—allow me to illustrate. When you go to a party, or conference—some place where you are meeting new people—inevitably someone will ask you to tell them a little about yourself.

Without thinking, we launch into the distinctions that mark people out in our society. Typically, we begin with our name, because names speak to identity—in particular, our last names often identify our national and ethnic roots. We might go on to talk about our families—*I’m married and have two kids*, or, *I live in Vancouver but my extended family live in China*. From there we might offer details about what University we are studying at; we might describe our job, our accomplishments, or hobbies.

When you meet someone for the first time, and they ask you to tell them about yourself, when’s the last time the first thing you said was, “*I’m a follower of Jesus Christ*”? “*If you want to know who I really am, I need to tell you about Jesus. His life has had such a profound effect on mine that telling you about Him will say a lot more about who I am than my ethnicity, sexuality, family, or economics could tell.*”

God the Son became Human. He became what we are so that we might be united to Him, and when we are united to Him, we get our humanity back—unity, diversity, harmony, and equality. It sounds wonderful, but there is still much work to be done. The distinctions between men and women, young and old, poor and rich, still breeds division and inequality in the world and in the Church. The Incarnation shows us the way forward.

Before I conclude this morning, I want to offer one final thought—the Incarnation has massive implications for our eschatology.

4. Implications for Eschatology: Eschatology is a word that simply means “*last things*,” it is that area of theology that is concerned with

the return of Jesus, the final events of history, and God's ultimate purpose for creation.

Creation is the overflow of God's goodness, beauty, and love; everything He made was just as He intended, in perfect relation to Him and to one another—it was paradise. We have to exercise our imaginations in order to grasp what it must have been like because we don't live in paradise anymore.

But God hasn't given up on creation; He had no intentions of throwing it on the scrap-heap and starting over from scratch. God's plan was to redeem what He created, and redemption has nothing to do with destruction, rather, redemption is about liberation, restoration, and renewal. This is where the Incarnation comes in.

Colossians 1:16 and following says, *“For by [Christ] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth...all things were created by [Christ] and for [Christ]...[and] God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in [Christ], and through [Christ], to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through [Christ's], blood, shed on the cross.”*

Why did God the Son become human? *Because He loves the world.* Why does He love the world? Because He still considers the world to be a good and beautiful place, a place worth renewing and restoring. God's intent was that all things will be reconciled to Him, that is to say, all things will be restored to His original purposes, and not just humanity, all things—all of creation.

The Incarnation speaks a powerful word, affirming the goodness of creation. When the history of the world comes to God's appointed

end, He's not going to throw His good creation on the scrap heap—He's going to renew and restore everything.

Knowing this, Christians can (and should be) at the forefront of creation-care. The first commission God gave to humanity was to bear His image and join Him in caring for the rest of creation—acting as stewards, gardeners, shepherds. To treat creation in any other way, to use creation to the name of “progress” or “profit” is to violate the trust God has given to us.

But let's go a little further. Since the future that awaits us is an embodied one, we are called to work in the present in such a way so as to honour what is coming. Those who work in medical, dental, or nutritional fields, your work can bring honour and healing to the human body—these are things God cares about deeply.

Those of you who are involved in social services—teachers, social workers, counsellors, foster care, child and family services—you are involved in bringing education, help, growth, and healing to people; these are things that God cares deeply about. This kind of work is aligned with why God became human, and what He is doing to restore and renew all things.

Conclusion/Lord's Supper: In the incarnation we celebrate the truth that God the Son—Co-Eternal, Co-Equal, with the Father and the Spirit—became human without ceasing to be God. The Incarnation speaks a powerful word, affirming the goodness of creation; by becoming human, God the Son bestowed dignity and glory upon humanity.

As I turn our attention now to the Lord's Supper, I want to bring you back to Galatians 3:26-28. *"So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*

At the foot of the cross the ground is level—all the distinctions that divide, all hierarchies, are done away with. We've all been made in God's image, we all stand before God in need of forgiveness, and we've all been invited—through Christ—to join God's family. Romans 10:9 declares that if we confess with our mouth that 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead, we will be saved.

In eating this meal, we don't recreate Jesus' death on the cross, instead, we celebrate the salvation He won for us. Through His incarnation, death, and resurrection, Jesus has taken our common humanity, sanctified it, and given it back to us. In Christ we are diverse, united, and equal—at the Lord's Table, we celebrate that together we form one family.

*"The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."*⁵

Invite servers forward

Worship

Benediction

⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:24-26.