

Christmas 10am 2010 – Living in the Moment

I've mentioned before that I feel almost guilty when we get to this service on Christmas Day because you rock up having already experienced the first hours of Christmas morning, possibly with over-excited children and presents and chocolate – three of the secret ingredients of a traditional Christmas Day – and here you are, looking for shepherds and angels and a baby in a manger and instead you get "In the beginning was the Word". You might possibly feel a bit cheated and, as I say, I almost feel guilty, but not quite.

John isn't like the other Gospels. While all four have their own agendas, their own slant on things, Matthew, Mark and Luke all on the story of Jesus in a more or less traditional, linear, start to finish kind of way. They all locate Jesus within a particular time and a particular place, and while Matthew focuses more on the religious context and Luke the geopolitical, John chooses to locate his account within the context of creation itself and rather than just there and then, John opts for the biggest possible picture. We might say that while Matthew, Mark and Luke focus on the moment, John focuses on every moment, and the result can be, well, overwhelming.

I'm a big picture kind of guy, or at least I try to be. While I often find myself tied up in the minutiae of whatever issue I'm focused on, dotting i's and crossing t's, and I genuinely believe that the details really do matter, I am also convinced that we need to be consistently aware of the wider context. When we fix our gaze solely on one part of a portrait we miss what the wider canvas has to offer. When we get so tied up in the details that we forget about the whole, then the big picture remains unseen. The problem with focusing on the big picture, of course, is that it is often just so big. There's so much to see, such a lot of detail to process, that sometimes it just becomes a bit of a blur. John's Gospel can be a bit like that. Sometimes when John gets into the big picture and sweeps through not just time but also space, and lays out the whole of creation before us as he attempts to do in the reading we've heard this morning, sometimes that just gets a bit much.

Give me shepherds and angels and Mary and Joseph; give me a smaller picture, give me just one, single moment.

Today is about that moment. Christmas focuses us in on that single point in time when the birth of a child in thoroughly underwhelming circumstances marked the beginning of a whole new world. The miracle of Christmas, as John kind of hints at, is not the birth of Jesus but the coming of God among us – the incarnation, the Word, who was in and before the very beginning of time, taking on our flesh and living, not just among us, but as us – human. That is the moment we have celebrated all these centuries at this time on this day and there are few moments in time more worthy of celebration. But, and this is a big but, to paraphrase the 12th century mystic Meister Eckhart, "what good is it if Jesus came in that moment, 2000 years ago, if he doesn't continue to come now?"

Today is about a moment, but in the big picture, as John tried hard to remind us, today is also about all moments. We could say that what we celebrate and remember this morning is nothing more than the continued unravelling of a moment that began before the

beginning, and we could rightly say that by gathering and joining to celebrate that moment we too are continuing to unravel that one seriously significant moment.

Because just as one brush stroke is not the painting, and yet the painting would not be what it is without that stroke, so what we celebrate this morning is, while a single moment, actually just a part of a much bigger, continually unravelling moment.

So my invitation, my Christmas gift to you this morning, is this: live in the moment. As we sing and pray and celebrate this morning that moment when God came among us, live as those who continue in that moment, continuing to unravel it today and tomorrow and through all the days ahead. It may not be shepherds and angels, but it is so much more. Live in this moment, and let this moment continue to live on in you.