

The Greatness of God ...

... *Shining in the Darkness*

A sermon given on the Second Sunday of Christmas, 3rd January 2021, by the Associate Vicar, the Revd Wendy Wale, in the Attended Communion Service.

John 1:1-18

[Wendy's microphone was not switched on to begin with] OK, let's begin again - Happy New Year.!

One of my favourite stories, which I've told twice now, but I'm going to tell it a third time, because it's a good one, is about the world famous violinist Joshua Bell. He sells tickets to his violin performances for thousands of dollars at a time. Joshua put on a baseball cap and started busking on a metro train station in Washington back in 2007. It was an experiment to see how people reacted. During the time he played, just over a thousand people walked past him. Twenty seven people threw a total of fifty two dollars into his baseball cap and just seven stopped to listen. Only one person recognised him and she threw in 20 of the dollars that were collected. In 2014, Joshua Bell repeated the experiment, except this time it got announced on social media and of course, thousands of people showed up, all delighted to be close to their hero. It was a triumph. The crowds clamoured to get near to his greatness. You see, as humans, most of us don't see what's hidden in plain sight; we need signposting and we need to learn to look more closely.

I used to live in Hampstead in London, and there were celebrities everywhere. Paparazzi often in my street and news stories about who was on the heath or in my local coffee shop were a regular feature of magazines such as Heat and other things that I don't read. But I was utterly oblivious, probably because I don't read those magazines largely unable to recognise a celebrity, even if they come up and chat to me. Which was demonstrated when I took a wedding once with a very enthusiastic young man who came to read the Bible for the young couple. He smiled at me as if I would know who he was. I smiled back and told him where to stand and what to do. He seemed very lovely and he was a very confident reader. It was only months later when I was watching the Olympics on the television that I suddenly leapt out my seat shouting, "Oh, I've met him. He was in my chapel. "It was the former Blue Peter presenter, broadcaster and commentator known as Radzi [Chinyanganya] who, if you've ever seen him, has incredible hair that you would never forget. Hence why I recognised him when I saw him a second time. Hidden

greatness is what John is announcing to his audience at the start of our gospel reading today, teaching us to look more closely, offering us the signposts.

'In the beginning' - sending us straight back to Genesis, to the creation of the world, to the creator. 'In the beginning was the Word,' the one who spoke, and there was life, the one with power and authority over all things. And the word was with God. Right from the start, God was relational, God was with the word. And the word was God. A statement far beyond explanation and yet such a powerful declaration, 'The Word was God.'

God's words and actions entwined, united, separate and yet one. This is greatness in its truest form. The greatness of God, whose creation acts concluded with people, men and women made in his image, charged with caring for and stewarding his creation. 'In him was life and the life was the light for all people.' We were designed to carry the image of God to see and value it in all people. To shine his light in the world.

Incredible enough, says John, but are you ready for the new announcement, this is something to blow your mind? 'And the Word became flesh and lived amongst us.' Joshua Bell busking at the train station; Radzi Chinyanganya hanging out in my chapel; the creator of the universe born as a baby in a backwater town in Palestine. It may blow your mind, but literally no one was going to notice unless we tell them: no film crews; no press releases; no Twitter announcements; just centuries of prophecies; a wild prophet in the wilderness, eating locusts and honey; a host of angels and a new star.

Hidden greatness needs announcing if it doesn't want to stay hidden. A friend of mine made a film about a Nigerian prince who came to the U.K. and became a street cleaner in London. The film explored how he was treated when no one knew who or what he was. They just saw his position and his seeming lack of status.

What do we make of the creator of the universe becoming a refugee in the Middle East? What do we want to see when we look for God? As we begin this new year, I wonder if we might join with the wise men, the stargazers, the seekers after truth, and look afresh for the greatness and the grace of God in the hidden places, in the unseen people who bear his image and carry his light.

I sense that we will continue to walk in the darkness of COVID for months, if not years to come. We will continue to miss contact with loved ones, coffees with friends and the freedom of travel and culture. We need to acknowledge the darkness, our frustrations,

griefs and losses. But we know the Word made flesh; the glory, grace and truth of Jesus Christ; the Word who is with God and the Word who is God.

May our lives point others towards light and hope; to God, who still dwells among us, however deep the darkness, whatever our status or position. May we begin by seeking the image of God in everyone we meet or encounter? By hearing their story, and encouraging the glimpses of glory that dwell within each one of us. May we shout, "Oh!" for all to hear, when we find the hidden greatness in the most surprising places. And may we live in the truth?

'But the light shines in the darkness. And the darkness did not overcome it.'

Reading Text

John 1:1-18

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ") ¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.