

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

Ezekiel 17:1-14

10th December 2017

Spirit... in all the ways you affect us... may this season be one for the imagination... but doesn't leave us here... to dream... but in the world... to restore... So be it... Amen

It has been a traumatic week... and the culprit... this year's Christmas jumper... You wouldn't have thought that something so fundamentally designed to bring good cheer... could cause trauma enough to find your inner scrooge and want to cancel Christmas... but it did...

This is about shopping... and I'm not going to be sexist... I am going to talk only for myself... which is not always something I have the chance to do in our house... but I have a feeling there will be a number of men... and some women... out there who can identify with this tale...

I went to buy said Christmas jersey... I went to Asda... other local supermarkets are available... and discovered to my horror... there was a whole aisle's worth of possible candidates... And while some may think... "what's the problem?"... the problem is... so many options for this to end badly...

There were blue ones... green ones and red ones... black ones... star wars ones... each with a different image... After about 20 minutes humming and hawing... I chose a burgundy colour... and the astute among you will notice that is not the colour of this jersey... thinking... somewhat logically... that last years jumper was blue... I really ought not to get another blue one...

So I hesitatingly pick the maroon one from the rail and headed to the desk... congratulating myself on my system of logic... having discounted Star Wars and black immediately... but half way there... all confidence left me... My gut was telling me... its the wrong shade of maroon... so I go back...

Now I'm down to only two options... the green one or the blue one... This ought to make it easier...

Suddenly I have a flash of inspiration... I should probably try it on for size... So I do... but... working logically again... as I remove the jumper I am already wearing... I notice... as it goes over my head... it's label... and right there in front of me... it says... Large...

Excellent... no need to try it on... I'll choose the large... and in a heady rush of new confidence... I choose the blue... in a large size...

Pleased that this shopping trip has now only taken me three-quarters of an hour I head to the checkout... pay... noticing the 100 day no quibbles returns policy... and thinking... Ha, that must be for the real novices at this... of which I now do not count myself... I rush home... and present said jersey to Shirley... whose first reaction is... "That's a large"...

Suddenly unsure of everything I have ever believed in... and thinking... have I missed something obvious... I suggest that the jersey I was wearing was a large...

I didn't finish that sentence before I was told... "Ah, but that's a TKMaxx Large... Asda large are larger"... Can anyone tell me what on earth is going on... why isn't a large... large... Why does TKMaxx, Asda, Primark, Tesco all have their own version of large... How do you discover this secret knowledge... and at which stage in my life did I miss it...

Of course I said none of that... Instead I jumped in the car... went back to Asda... exchanged the jersey... making use of the 100 day no quibble returns policy... and what you see before you is this years... blue... medium... - that's an Asda medium -... Christmas jersey... and I'm never going to go shopping on my own again...

I suppose if there is the season for things not being as they seem... where logic doesn't work and imagination is necessary... then Advent is it...

Take for example Ezekiel... who never knew about Asda... but in a rush of vision... is taken to a valley... scattered... with dry bones... bones that have not the slightest hope of life within them...

Remember this is an image of Israel at the end of the Babylonian exile... spent... dry... Their homeland... is ruined... and the people in exile... have lost all hope...

And Ezekiel's breath is taken away... literally... as he is given the task to prophecy to the bones... and the wind... and in some holy combination... the foot bone... shifts... to the nearest ankle bone... and together they find a leg bone... and before long a whole body of bones is standing there... but not just one... a whole valley-full...

But as Ezekiel blinks in the bleached brightness of these skeletons... he is told to prophecy again... and he does... and opens his mouth... Hear the word of the Lord... and as he does so... his words... conjure sinews... tangling themselves round limbs... and muscle... stretching between joints... and skin... unfolding over the muscle...

And just when he thinks he's run out of words... another call... "Prophecy!"... and he does... "Hear the word of the Lord"... he says... and the whole nation of God... once moribund and dry... takes a collective breath and is restored to life...

"And this is your hope,"... says the lord... This is your purpose... to live towards that vision and believe it is true...

It is a restoration so improbable... that it can hardly be imagined... But this is the very calling of God's people... Many Israelites had given up imagining in Babylon...

But when we surrender our imaginations to the political probabilities of the day... the bones just fall back into dusty heaps... and the future is buried under them... Ezekiel's vision calls his people... "Find your holy imagination again"... Which is our invitation too... and if ever there is a season to imagine... the season in which God prepares for incarnation... is it...

A lack of imagination has Jesus born only in a story book... and angels without wings... stables that house only animals... and shepherds lost somewhere on a hillside...

Incarnation is the restoration of the divine imagination... where... if this might be possible... God putting on skin... and that possibility begins only in our imaginations... if this might be possible... God in the flesh... if we can imagine such a thing... then the world has hope... If these bones can live in our imaginations... then these bones can live in reality...

We constrict the horizons of the future when we cannot imagine anything different than what we have now... but the incarnation... is the supreme act of imagining the future... God thinking outside the box... choosing to do something unheard of... in order to restore the world... to redeem it... renew it...

And what God does... is God reduces Godself... limits the divine to human form... Imagine that... especially when everything in the world tends to expect us to do the opposite... and enlarge ourselves... enrich ourselves... expand ourselves...

But God being human... if we can imagine such a possibility... then we can also imagine... God's face in each other again... If we can imagine God is within each of us... then we might see what is holy, sacred and divine in each other again...

And we can see what that does if we can imagine the incarnation... when we can imagine a world where we dare to live closer to each other... because God is one of us... and if we can imagine that... then the future is possible... and the dry bones of our fears and anxiety... can be restored to a more compassionate, hope-filled future...

And my friends... it begins here... it begins with the inspiration and imagination... of the incarnation... If we can believe all of heaven can be channelled into human form... then the good news of the redeeming the world is possible... even a world where I can go shopping and buying the right thing first time... (but then again...)

References

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