

## Christmas Eve 2021

Two years ago, right around this time of Christmas, we had the first inklings of a new disease called COVID 19.

And tonight, two years later, we sit in the midst of a third wave of this terrible pandemic, as it mutates.

And spreads.

And kills.

Two years of pandemic, with no end in sight.

Two years of increasing divisions within our nation over issues of race, vaccinations, immigration and voting rights.

On top of all that, throw on a fat dollop of climate change and the political gridlock that refuses to face this crisis and the question you might be asking is:

Where do we go from here?

The question is especially pressing when we see Christianity being used as a justification for racism.

For the denial of the science of vaccines.

For the rampant nationalism that is based on white supremacy.

Did you see the Jesus banners at the despicable insurrection at the Capitol last January?

Using God to justify violence, fear, and “us against them” is a stark reminder of how, down through the ages, we who call ourselves “human” have projected our love of violence, fear, and “us against them” onto the character of God.

Thereby justifying our love affair with violence, fear and “us against them.”

Perhaps the greatest mistake humanity makes is our firmly held belief that we are in fact human.

We are not!

“We are instead only partly human.

Only brokenly human.

Yes, we see glimpses of our humanness.

Yet we can only dream of what a more human existence, a more human political order, might look like.

We have not yet become human.

In truth, only God is human.

And yet thankfully, because we are made in God’s image, we are capable of becoming human.” Walter Wink, *Just Jesus*, p. 102, paraphrased.

And it is this hope, that we might all of us, someday become human, that brings us together tonight.

Because in truth the whole of creation is groaning.

As in the pains of childbirth.

Right up to the present moment.

That we are still on the way to becoming human is announced in every headline.

From the latest New York Times report that our drones have killed thousands of innocent civilians, to the Navy's disingenuous denials of fuel leaks into our aquifer.

From reports of members of congress conspiring to overthrow the last election to the brakes suddenly put on an aggressive response to the crisis of climate change.

We are on the way to becoming human.

But we are not yet there.

And yet, we come to this night and discover that despite all of our struggles and failures and foibles, despite our chronic brokenness, God delights in us.

Even in our imperfection.

Even when we are cowards.

Even when we are murderers and liars who are addicted to death.

Even when we are slaves to security.

Even then, God is determined to fashion us into something far greater than we can ever imagine." James Allison, paraphrased.

Fr. Vince Donovan lived among the Masai people in Tanzania for many years.

They are a cattle raising people who wander with their herds throughout vast Savannahs.

They worship their ancestors.

And nature.

They believe that this life is all there is.

We live for a time, and then perish, forever.

One Christmas night, as they sit warming themselves around a blazing fire under a starlit sky, an elder says: 'human beings are like the sparks of this fire.

Alive for a moment, and then, forever gone."

Fr. Vince, sitting quietly for a moment, replies:

"Maybe not.

Perhaps humanity isn't an accident of the universe.

Perhaps humanity is more than a flickering light that is destined to be crushed with sorrow.

Perhaps humanity is God, appearing in the universe.

Right in the midst of all God creates.

Which, if true, changes everything, don't you think?

The Masai, perhaps like many of us, are shaking their heads and saying,

'No, people are not like God!

Human beings?

They fight.

Kill.

Destroy.

They do everything to separate themselves from one another.'

But Fr. Vince responds:

'Maybe we haven't met a human being.

A truly human being.

What if creation isn't yet finished?

What if we're in the midst of a creation that's groaning?

Yearning to become whole?

Longing to become the body of God?

Now suppose that, in the fullness of time, by the work of God, there is a man who is, at long last, fully, perfectly human?

If such a man were to be born into this world, then, what else could we say, but: this man IS God?

God appearing in the universe.

Jesus is that man!

And what he shows us, through his life, given over to service and love and surrender, is not only who **God** is, but who **we are** too." V. Donovan, Christianity Rediscovered, 57, paraphrased.

Perhaps that's what brings us here tonight.

To remember.

To learn again, for the first time, the nature of our true identity.

And our inevitable destiny.

Whether you show up here always or never.

Whether your faith is deep or non-existent.

The one thing that connects all of us to each other is our true identity.

It is our inevitable destiny.

That you are a child of God.

And even more, that you are a beloved child of God.

Beloved by the child that God himself becomes.

Beloved by the God who knows every form of human difficulty.

Who promises NOT to rescue us from danger, but to be with us in the midst of every danger.

This holy night, as we marvel at the God who becomes one of us, remember this.

You are made in that very image.

“And if you could see with the eyes of the soul, you’d see angels crying out:

‘Behold the image of God!

Make way for the image of God!’ Long, Testimony, 46.

As you walk the dog, or stare at the moonlight.

This night, in all of our incompleteness, in all of our struggles, God says to the whole world, from the Masai herdsman to the insurrectionists, from the Black Lives Matter folk to Kyle Rittenhouse:

“You are accepted.

You are accepted by that which is greater than you, the name of which you don’t know.

Do not ask for the name now; perhaps you will find it later.

Do not try to do anything now; perhaps later you will do much.

Don't seek for anything.

Don't intend anything.

Simply accept the fact that you are accepted." Tillich.

If we can embrace our acceptance, perhaps then we can unclench the fist.

Perhaps then we can lay down the fiery rhetoric and the certainties with which we hold fast to our views.

Perhaps we can exhale at the sheer wonder that in this child, through the grace of God, all of humanity is home free.

I know.

It sounds too good to be true.

But from the earliest moment of creation's "Let there be light" through the call of Abraham to become the father of all nations, to the prophets who heard the promise of God to make the crooked ways straight, to transform mountains into valleys, and in whom both lion and lamb rest together, the great project of creation will inevitably find its new birth.

"A magnificent, yet delicate project.

Worked out over the vast expanse of time.

Revealing not the power of one who insists on cleaning up everyone's act.



But the greater power of one who patiently and compassionately and gently loves us into being.

This gracious God, for whom time doesn't matter." James Allison, paraphrased.

If we can at this moment raise our eyes and see the God who is with us, among us and for us, perhaps then we shall realize that God doesn't come to punish, or frighten, or scold.

Instead, God comes to assure us, all of us, even you, even me, that we are deeply, truly, and forever loved.

Merry Christmas!

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