

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel...in July”
(28July2020) Matt1:18-23; John1:14,16,18

Last week, as Pastor Sonja shared the reflection for the first shared MCC outdoor service of this summer and (as we’re frequently saying) of this era, the reading about Jacob dreaming came from a summer lectionary series, and gave us his great epiphany: “Surely God is in this place.”

That series continues through the book of Genesis. But this week’s story of conscripted labor with polygamous results seemed less helpful of an epiphany for us, so Sonja and I were discussing what might be the message you need to hear through these days, and the ongoing reiteration of “Surely God is in this place” might be what you need.

We were realizing the Bible is thick with this assurance. So next week, Intern Lisa will choose another form of that revelation or guarantee to unpack for us.

For current unpacking, with “a peddler just opening his pack,” and with the St. Nickyness of it all, I can’t help but have a predisposition to want to celebrate Christmas in July.

Now, you may not want to think about Christmas. You may be content in summer, especially on a beautiful evening. I have continued to be surprised at how much daily I hear dread voiced about what we’ll do when winter does come, trying to prepare for the larger, longer reality. Still, Jesus says today’s troubles are enough for today.

So I’m not dragging you to December directly, especially not in a hard or bad way. For now, just take the amusing image of a jolly old saint who arrives with flying reindeer, and dusts himself off—as much as one can when “tarnished with ashes and soot”—after squeezing down the chimney. For that style of arrival, we could say it’s even more surprising that God arrived in our world through a birth. God chooses to come into human life, through a mother’s pregnancy, through the fragility of being a baby. Indeed, simply that God put on our flesh to dwell in our bodies. “Word of

the Father, now in flesh appearing: O Come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!”

If we’d imagine spirituality in contrast with our bodies, like heaven vs. earth, that these things are just decrepit and decaying and prone to guilty pleasures, then we’re ignoring that God shows up this way, to be with us. God chose to be born in a body. Jesus not only had his own body; he liked other bodies. That’s why so much of what he did involved feeding the hungry and healing the sick and also celebrating, and in the end involved walking out of a tomb to overcome the suffering of his body in service of larger life.

That bodily, physical center of our faith feels especially relevant right now. Our faith is incarnational—with worship usually including our bodies touching, breathing, speaking, singing, eating, looking, smelling, moving, relating. We are glad to be together; disembodied or disconnected Christianity is an oxymoron. For those participating from home, you’re still very much in your body, and I hope joining in the movements for prayers, and realizing your connections in all creation.

Physical, incarnational wholeness is especially important through these days. It means bodies matter, and we’re especially needing to remember that about black bodies and black lives. And as God is concerned about our bodies, it’s about wellness and health, about this life. Mike Ries will be using his body to play music for us, and his body is also serving in the hospital for those with COVID-19. As suffering and sickness abound, we need God to care about real us, to know our existence, with us in our bodies. Let us pray:

*Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay
close by me forever and love me, I pray.*

Bless all the dear children

in your tender care

and make us know heaven,

that you live with us here. Amen