



Closer Than Your Own Breath

Homily for St. John's Episcopal Church by Lisa Wiens Heinsohn Christmas Eve, 2022

Merry Christmas!

Wherever you have come from, welcome. Whether you've been here a thousand times or five times or this is your first time, welcome. Whether you are feeling joy or pain, welcome. Whoever you are, welcome. From all walks of life we are gathered here, including those of you watching over the livestream or reading this later. I do not believe this is chance. This is a synchronicity of Spirit that gathers us together in the eternal realm of God that transcends time and space.

And in this togetherness, we are celebrating the birth of the Christ Child. People have been trying to make meaning of Jesus with words ever since he was born, but even though our tradition has so many words in it, the words are actually less important than the energy they contain, than the reality they represent. The reality of Christ is the recognition of utter Sacredness, the perfect union of human and divine.

What is the most sacred thing you have ever seen?

What has moved you with profound awe?

Sometimes encountering the sacred generates a feeling of infinite tenderness and preciousness, like holding a newborn child. Sometimes it's cause for intimacy like lovers embracing one another. Sometimes it's like the awe and gratitude one feels at the beauty of a sunrise or Lake

Superior. The reality of Christ, when we have eyes to recognize it, can give us such a profound peace in the presence of such sacredness that we forget ourselves, we pour ourselves out in love for the other.

So why am I talking about newborn babies and Lake Superior and not just Jesus? For Christians Jesus is the Incarnation of God: God condensed into human form. Jesus lived this reality without compromise, fully. But today I want to invite us to consider an expansion of this beautiful reality. The Christ Mystery is bigger than the historical Jesus. The experience of Christ is what happens when we live in full alignment with being made out of the very being of God. We can intellectually know and even deeply believe in the divinity of Jesus born 2000 years ago. It is another thing entirely to discover the presence of Christ, the presence of sacred union with God, within your own being and in those around you and in this beautiful world.

Let me ask you something that might seem unrelated but at least to me right now it isn't. What is your favorite thing to eat for Christmas? Does your family have a wonderful food tradition? In our family we have this incredible almond bread, and my mother from Santa Fe makes chili relleno, and my sister makes such strong spiked eggnog you can hardly taste the cream. What is the food that delights you at Christmas?

Recently in another sermon I spoke about the feeling of being hungry, and opening the fridge, and just not seeing anything that looked good in it. Sometimes our experiences of religion can be like that. Perhaps we come to church yearning for we don't even know what, but only dimly sensing whatever it is, from too far away. But I believe that the reality of Christmas, the infinite self-forgetting delight of witnessing the Sacred in Jesus, and then within ourselves and all around us, like holding a baby or

seeing beauty, is at least as nourishing as those delicious food traditions you have for the holidays.

The delight and joy of Christmas comes from being nourished by what has always been true, what we have so badly needed all along and what is closer than your own name or your own breath, which is that you and everyone and everything else are made of God and are made to embody love no less than Jesus did.

Experiencing this nourishes the soul. Let us be honest about how hungry we are. I pray that you have the experience of God who is everywhere and who waits to commune with you and fill you. May you have eyes to see this and arms to hold it and hearts to fall in love with it.

I know there is much that is difficult in the world. Not everything is in alignment with the divine radiance that is the essence of all things, including ourselves. But we are meant to heal that which is out of alignment and to embody love in our words and actions and lifestyles. And for Christians that begins right here, at the birth of Christ, in the presence of God in this physical world and not some heaven light years away. It continues in our own sacredness and living in communion and alignment with Christ, embodying divine light increasingly more and more all the time. Let this be born again in us this night. May Christ's Spirit utterly fill you with profound peace and healing. May your hunger be deeply satisfied with all that is good and true. May you rest in the companionship of God who cannot leave you, who is closer than your own name. Merry Christmas.