

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera QLD

Christmas Day 2024

John 1:1-14

DOWN TO EARTH

Have you ever had the chance to meet someone famous? I guess there are different levels of that, aren't there? There's the people who are well-known on a local level, politicians, media and sporting stars, other local celebrities, who we wouldn't be surprised to just bump into as we go around the Gold Coast. There's those who are well-known on a national level, from the same kind of categories, who we do occasionally see up close perhaps as we go through an airport. And then there's those who are famous internationally, watched and seen by millions of people, who to us may seem to be 'unreal', 'untouchable', and certainly could not be a real, breathing, person like us. Have you ever met someone of that level of fame, and, if you have, what was it like? There are those who say that we shouldn't meet our heroes because we set ourselves up to be disappointed, that what they are like in public or in front of a camera is a persona that we won't necessarily encounter when we meet them face to face. We might hope that they will be someone we will get along well with, but discover that their fame means they won't be the down to earth person we want them to be. We hear people having experiences on both sides of this.

About twelve months ago, thanks to a gift from some of my children, I got to meet the person who has been the sporting hero of my life, West Indian cricketer Brian Lara. During the '90's and 2000's he was one of the top batsmen in world cricket, and still holds the record for the highest ever test score, 400 runs. Not only was I thrilled at the chance to meet the great man, but over 30 years ago some good friends had given me a West Indies shirt, and I wanted to get it signed by him. The event I attended was what they call a 'non-signing' event, but I had worked my plan out, sneaked the shirt past security, and when it was my turn to walk up to him for a handshake and a picture I whipped out the

shirt and a marker and said, 'Brian, I've been a huge fan of yours for years. Would you sign my shirt please?' He replied, 'We're not supposed to sign anything, but yeh ok'. His hero status for me just got higher. What a down to earth guy he was, giving me a memory which is significant to me on so many levels.

As Australians, we don't tend to like people who put themselves up above others, do we? We like those who have made it to the top in their field, who are successful, but who still talk to us mere mortals as equals, and who are even humbled by our hero worship. There are many themes about the Christmas story, and it's one we all know well. One of the big things John is really making clear to us at the beginning of his story about Jesus, is that God is 'Down to Earth'. The way this reading finishes really sums it all up, 'The Word became a human being and lived here with us. We saw his true glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father. From him all the kindness and all the truth of God have come down to us'. It's a story we've heard often, and we know it well, but think about it again. Remember how when, thousands of years ago, Moses went up on Mt. Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. At the end of his 40 days up there Moses asked to see God. God's reply, 'No one can look on my face and live'. Moses had to be content with looking at God's back after He had passed by, that's how great and powerful God's glory is. But now, all of God's glory, all of His strength, all of His goodness, all of His justice, all of this comes down in a tiny baby. No longer is God aloof and above us. Now God is with us, Immanuel, a part of our history, knowing what it's like to experience everything we experience in our lives.

In the form of that tiny baby, God came down to earth, came to be one of us. John also reminds us here that Jesus came to be the light who shines in the darkness. It doesn't take much looking around us, reading or hearing the news, to see the darkness. We see wars, we see injustice. We see people being used and abused just for the profit or pleasure of others. Not new, but certainly not any less than it's been before. But it's not just something we see happening to people far away, this darkness comes into our lives too. We have relationships which are not always what they could be, or what we'd like

them to be. We have the clouds of things like sickness and death coming into our lives. We have the worries and uncertainties about how things are going to turn out for us, or for our family. We have guilt over things we've done in the past, guilt which time doesn't just heal by itself. There is much to be thankful for in our lives, but there also seems to be those things which come in and cloud them.

Jesus is the light who comes into that darkness. For our broken relationships, He brings the peace which can only come through knowing His forgiveness and passing it on to others. To our despair, He brings hope. To our worries, He brings the peace of being able to hand them over to the care of the One who not only created the world but still cares for it each day. In the face of death, He brings the promise of new life. That's a lot to place in just one small package, but that's what God did. Into our darkness, He brought light, the light which, through His death and resurrection, still shines today.

And not only did Jesus, God-come-down-to-earth, bring light into our world, He also enabled us to know God. God is no longer up above His people so that they can't even look at Him. God came down, as One of us, so that in knowing Jesus we now know God. If we want to know how loving God is, we can look at the way Jesus treated people in His earthly life, caring for them, protecting the weak and oppressed, healing the sick, befriending the lonely. If we want to know how great God's power is, we can remember Jesus stilling the storm, raising the dead to life, driving out demons. And if we want to know how much God wants us to be able to come back to Him, we can think of the life of obedience to His Father's plan which Jesus lived, a path which took Him right up to His death on the cross. Unlike any other religion in the world, our God came down to show us who He really is. In knowing God the Son, we can also know the very nature and the acts of God the Father. We can come to know Him in a very real way, not as someone who is abstract and far away, but as One who has been a part of our world and now also wants to be a part of our lives.

God is down to earth. This is one of the big things we celebrate at Christmas, perhaps without always thinking about it that way. God saw the problem of sin the world, He saw the darkness, He

saw that people didn't really know Him, and so, in the form of Jesus, He came down to be one of us. Because of Jesus, to approach God now isn't like approaching some celebrity we revere from afar, but instead we approach Him as our friend and brother, as well as our Creator and Saviour. God is down to earth. The God who is the Creator of the world also came down to be a part of His Creation. And this fact, along with Jesus' saving act which goes with it, is what makes the miracle of Christmas so special, and such good news for our lives today. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Have you ever met someone famous, or do you know someone who has? What was it like for you/them; was this person very down to earth and personable, or did they come across as more aloof so that the encounter wasn't as good as hoped?
- Reflect on/discuss with others, what it means for us that in Jesus God is down to earth. How does this affect our relationship with God? How does it help God to know everything we now go through in our lives?
- Think about the 'darkness' you see around you, perhaps even experience in your life. Jesus came to be the light shining in the darkness, what does this mean for you? How does the light of God's love in Jesus shine light into the areas of darkness in life or our world which you see/experience?

Pray: thank God for sending Jesus into the world, so that in a very down to earth way we can have a relationship with Him. Ask God to help us to always keep the light of God's love as a central part of our lives.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
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