

SERMON: 22 December 2019 – Rev Alistair Cowper

“Christmas in Four Pictures”

(Matthew 1:18-25)

Jesus was born into poverty and Mary and Joseph and Jesus became refugees dependent on the hospitality of strangers in a foreign land.

What’s clear from the Christmas story is that God loves refugees and works to end their refugee status. No one should be a refugee.

Last week I came across this photograph [Picture 1 Refugee Nativity] on social media. It’s a life sized nativity scene outside a church in California, not far from the Mexican border.

Mary and Joseph and the new born baby Jesus are separated from each other, locked behind bars, in the same way that several thousand refugee families trying to get into America are being separated from each other today.

Beside the scene was the question, “what if this family sought refuge in our country today?” How would we react if these strangers appeared on our doorstep?

Christmas is especially a time to share love and not to separate families from each other. And the right thing to do is to help refugees and anyone else who is in need, because that’s what God wants.

Jesus grew up to teach us kindness and mercy and a radical welcome of all people. He said, ‘whenever someone was hungry and you gave them food, or thirsty and you gave them something to drink, or was a stranger and you welcomed them, you did it for me’ (Matthew 25:35).

You might be glad to know that inside that same church building is a second nativity scene, in which Mary, Joseph and Jesus are united together and surrounded by shepherds and angels singing, ‘glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and good will to all’ (Luke 2:14).

But here’s another unusual Christmas picture.

Picture 2 - Refugee Christmas

This is a modern painting using a medieval theme of showing saints with a halo around their heads. Usually it was just for special people but in this picture it’s for these poor refugees who are again supposed to remind us of

Mary, Joseph and Jesus. Again, this picture says to me that God is for everyone, and especially, the underdog, the poor, the weak and the vulnerable.

God didn't choose to be born as a rich and powerful king called Jesus, surrounded by gold chariots and lots of servants. God chose instead to associate with the least, to be born into poverty in order to change history.

Picture 3 - David's Town

Another modern picture which reminds me that the Christmas story isn't stuck in the past, 2,000 years ago, but is very much a story which involves all of us, everyone. The story of God becoming human is right up to date and has an effect on every journey we make and in every day we live.

Picture 4 - Madonna Mod

The 4th picture is another modern one, showing Mary and Jesus and the Dove representing the Holy Spirit, as God's presence.

This simple picture also says to me that God is present in all of life, in your life and in mine. I believe it says that all of our lives are affected by Christmas in a way that connects us with God in love.

Every time a new baby is born, God is there in the love that shows itself in the care and attention the parent has for the child and in the support of family and friends and doctors and nurses.

Indeed, I think that every time we show kindness, every time we express our love, every time we jump for joy, every time we weep in sadness, God is there in the love that shows itself.

The Bible says this, "No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love has been brought to full expression through us" (1 John 4:12).

God is present wherever love is, because God is love.

According to the Christmas Carol, 'Love came down at Christmas', 'Love was born at Christmas'.

Something is now born in everyone that wants to be loved but also to reach out to other living creatures, human and animal, and love them. Christmas is the perfect time to do that; to let love in and let love out; to know that you and I and all of us are loved, and to discover true happiness through sharing that love with each other.

So amid all the presents we might receive soon, let's try to live and move and act in the gift of love whenever we can. Love may not be an expensive gift but its the most precious gift of all.

This Christmas, may we discover new depths of grace, peace, love and joy, and may we be inspired to live in the good news of great joy for everyone that the angels announced to weary shepherds and wandering star gazers.