

## Reflection for PENTECOST 2022 - "God with Skin On" by Rev'd Peter Shaw

Dear Friends,

During the past six months of the church year, we have once again journeyed with Jesus through the incredible events of his life:

- During the Season of Advent, we awaited his coming.
- During the short Season of Christmas we witnessed his birth as a tiny, new born infant and worshiped him with the shepherds and the wise men.
- During the Season of Epiphany, we heard Simeon predict the events that were to come.

We began the Season of Lent by following Jesus into the wilderness - Forty days later, we entered Jerusalem with him riding on a donkey - and then began that most holy week of all - the week which culminates in the resounding cry that we hear on Easter morning: **Alleluia, Christ is risen - The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

And with these words, the Season of Easter – Eastertide - began - a season during which we celebrate the remarkable news of the resurrection - the news that Jesus had conquered death for all our sakes – **Jesus lives!**

These past six months have been quite a journey - a journey which records the landmark events in the life of Jesus - the man who is God, yet also human. It's the story of the central mystery of Christianity - the incarnation - God taking on human form and dwelling amongst us, though still remaining God.

We have celebrated this remarkable story for over 2000 years now.

When we think of the incarnation, we sometimes think of it like this:

- God walked on this earth, physically, for thirty-three years, he died, he rose, and then he returned to heaven. When he left, he sent the Holy Spirit to be present among us - but the actual physical body of Jesus was gone, gone that is, until he comes again in the last days.

That is true – but only up to a point

For a short period of time, Jesus was here on earth among us - healing, teaching, and revealing God - in all of God's compassion and love. **But** he is not actually here anymore – he is alongside His Father in heaven. The incarnation - that time when Jesus - God made man - was physically present and lived and walked among us - is over. And while the Holy Spirit is real - the Spirit is not the actual physical presence of God. Frequently, I find myself wishing that Jesus were still here - in the flesh, so that I could feel his presence, hear his voice, talk to Him, and see the love and compassion in his eyes.

There is a lovely little story about a child who woke up one night after a frightening nightmare. She was convinced that there were all kinds of monsters and goblins lurking under her bed and in the corners of her room. She ran to her parents' bedroom and after her mother had calmed her down, she took the child back to her own room and said, "You don't need to be afraid, you aren't alone here. God is right here with you in your room." The little girl said, "I know that God is here, but I need someone in my room who has some skin on!"

We would all like God to have some skin on. We would like Him to be present here and now, in the flesh, here in our communities in this most beautiful part of His Creation.

But he is no longer with us - in the flesh – so what now?

A well known American theologian- Ronald Rolheiser – writing in his book - *The Holy Longing* - suggests that our limited understanding of the incarnation - God made man - is **what can make it so hard** for us to find that real, live, physically present God in our lives today.

**He notes that our sometimes rather short-sighted perspective can give the impression that the incarnation was a thirty-three year event; a one-shot excursion by God into human history...and now - it's over.**

Well – if that is the case, why are we here, what are we doing, why are we Christians?

In response to that question, we need to understand that the incarnation didn't just suddenly come to an end when Jesus ascended to heaven. The incarnation is still going on - it's just as real today as it was when Jesus walked the dusty roads of Palestine - **Jesus lives – through us, here, today - now!**

When the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles on that very first Pentecost - after Jesus had ascended into heaven - God once again came among us – by pouring out His spirit on the Apostles – changing them from fearful followers of Christ, cowering away behind locked doors, into fearless followers of God, empowering them with His mission, ready to do His will and bring something of His kingdom to His people on earth;

**God's presence - through the Apostles - was amongst us again.**

And to emphasise this change, just think - how many points out of 10 would you give St Peter before the Resurrection, and then after Pentecost!

Ever since, God has been sending us the Holy Spirit for that same reason. Through the Holy Spirit, God awakens in each of us the gifts that God needs to continue His presence in this weary old world.

On that first Pentecost, God became dependent upon human beings in a whole new way - and God has been dependent on us ever since.

Pentecost is perhaps the most important season of the church year - because it's the season when God once again fills us up with the Holy Spirit so that we can be renewed in the Body of Christ - **and** continues to make sure that God “has skin”.

It's the season when we are called to allow those gifts, with which God has blessed us, to be used **so** that those who need God in their lives - a real, physical God with skin - will be able to find that God. Jesus did it 2000 years ago - but now God is depending on us to do it.

Yes - it's all up to us now, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be heralds of God's Kingdom - just as those Apostles were after the Holy Spirit had descended on all of them.

During this Season of Pentecost - what are each one of us going to do to ensure that the incarnation continues to live on in **us** as the Body of Christ - so that all those in our communities, who are so in need of God's unconditional love will be able to find it - by finding a God with skin.

A God ... who will hold them when they need to be held, who will comfort and reassure them when they are afraid,

A God... who will laugh with them when they are delighted, who will run an errand for them when they are homebound, who will pick up the phone to let someone know that they are being thought of, who will mourn with them when they grieve,

A God... who will house them when they are homeless, feed them when they are hungry, and visit them when they are in prison, who will sit silently with them when they simply need a quiet companion by their side.

I leave two thoughts for us to ponder:

- How can we use our gifts from God to further His kingdom here on earth?
- Through the power of the Holy Spirit, are we ready to allow God to use them?

St. Teresa of Avila wrote a prayer, a prayer which I use as my Mantra. This prayer expresses our situation in relation to God's presence so concisely, so beautifully. She wrote:

Christ has no body now but yours,  
no hands but yours,  
no feet but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which  
Christ's compassion must look out on the world.

Yours are the feet with which  
He is to go about doing good.

Yours are the hands with which He is to bless people now.

**Remember - God and indeed all of His Creation, is depending on us. AMEN.**