

**Christmas Day**  
**25/12/2008**

**Mark the Evangelist**

**Isaiah 52:7-10**

**Psalm 98**

**Hebrews 1-4**

**John 1:1-14**

**Emmanuel: the precious jewel - Love, actually**

---

During a graduation ceremony at Griffith University Justice Michael Kirby said his impending retirement had concentrated his mind “on the things that really matter” with the result that he choose to speak about “the most important thing” he had discovered, a precious jewel of knowledge. “I refer to love,” he said. “Love for one another. Love for our community. Love for others everywhere in the world. Love transcends even scholarship and university degrees. It is greater than pride and wealth. It endures when worldly vanities fade.” (*The Age* 17 December 2008) In his speech Justice Kirby showed that “the essential underpinning of human rights is love.” It enables “Empathy for fellow human beings. Feeling pain for the refugee; for the victim of war; for the prisoner deprived of a vote, for the child dying of cholera in Zimbabwe.” He challenged his audience to eschew greed and the quest for power, and to work to enable love to govern in the world. Justice Kirby’s topic may have surprised his audience, but his many years in public life working to bring light to dark places has been informed by ongoing reflection nurtured by his Christian commitment. Justice Kirby’s “precious jewel” about love, actually is more than the distillation of his years. It is Godly wisdom.

The search for the wisdom that gives meaning to life has been a perennial human concern that reached a peak in Greek philosophy. The word philosophy literally means the “love of wisdom” [from philo (love) Sophia (wisdom)]. The Wisdom tradition in the Bible is found especially in Job and Proverbs. God’s first act was said to be the creation of wisdom, which was given a female personality and had cosmic status. Wisdom worked beside God at Creation like a craftsperson. But at first Wisdom remained hidden from mortals and was not to be found in any part of Creation. According to Job the way to access wisdom was to live in honour of God: “*Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding.*” [Job 28:28].

In later reflection Israel’s sages became aware of the chasm between human wisdom and the wisdom of God, but their reflection also led them to say that the gulf was spanned from God’s side. By the grace of God divine wisdom sought companionship amongst us and made the human condition its home. Paul saw that wisdom in Christ, in whom the power of God’s reconciling love was at work. Hebrews takes up the theme, which is especially strong in the majestic words of John who proclaims a link between the cosmic realm of Creation, the Word and Wisdom of God, and a Life that is found among us.

The mystery of the truth incarnate is that the energy of God goes out from God and appears in flesh: eternity enters time. This is the miracle we sing of with such joy today, because this is love, actually. The gift is, here is a life that helps us make sense of life, and in this person, we see the essence of the cosmic reality we call God. In him we are enabled to grasp the inner logic of the universe, and from him we learn whom we can trust with our life. What we are given is not an idea, or a messenger but a person to embrace and a life to follow.

The miracle of the Incarnation is that it completely reshapes how we look at one another, and approach life. If this life is the key to life, take note of this. The person we embrace and the life we celebrate here was lived in utter humility, born of self-emptying love that reached beyond the borders of self-interest or family, race or nation. Welcomed by shepherds he welcomed outsiders to his side, at table and on the cross. He did not choose to overpower us or seek to place boundaries around our life. Instead he offered us an utterly new possibility of life, set against an infinite horizon. He did not destroy freedom he created it, and in doing so disturbed the status quo, which is why John says, he came to his own and his own did not receive him. But the power that was in him, continued to seek companionship with us, for in him was life, and that life was the light of all, and nothing we could do could stop it. When the choice is made to live following him, love actually becomes the driver of a life that is different from the rest. And yet it makes sense of the whole.

In the film *Love Actually* there is a scene near the end where the children from Watford Primary School in London stage a Nativity play. Their creative teacher had them standing around the crib dressed up, not as Ox and Ass, but as Crayfish, Octopus, and many other unusual beasts. The children sang - *Catch a falling star and put it in your pocket, never let it fade away...*

However the real truth about Christmas is that you cannot put this star in your pocket. Divine love actually works the other way round. The story of a child who was born and a life that was lived is the story of how, in order to restore us to fullness of life, God reached out and accommodated the divine mystery to our concerns. And the end of the story - the Resurrection shows how everything we did to “put it in our pocket” would not confine this star. For the light that shines through this life has its origin in transcendent reality. It is a compelling light and will not be contained or constrained by any human designs or devices.

Why we are so joyful today is because this life makes it clear divine Love actually has chosen to reach out and draw us into its loving purposes. And this is not our own benefit. We are loved like this so that love will give birth to more love, in as many lives as catch a glimpse of this light, and say yes to this invitation to new life.

\*\*\*