

Second Sunday of Christmas, Year C, January 2, 2022 John 1:1-18
Epiphany, Winnipeg

I promise that I will only say COVID twice. That's the first time. Here's the second: The world is so much bigger than COVID.

Because there is so much beauty in the world.

A few days ago the world said goodbye and thank you to Desmond Tutu. Did you notice, if you read the news or watched the news or heard other people talk about him, how much he smiled and laughed? In the middle of so much going wrong and so much injustice, in the thick of this life he lived with his people while they worked together against all kinds of oppression, here's this towering figure, a towering smallish person, who loved to laugh, and smile. He danced his way up to the stage when he received the Nobel Peace Prize, he danced down the aisle of a church when the police raided it in the middle of a service. He wept openly when he heard people tell their stories of being hurt and of causing the hurt. He cried, he danced, he laughed; he just couldn't stop being human. There is so much beauty in the world.

Just a few days before Christmas fifteen or so of us gathered in the parking lot around a fire just outside here. There was a fire in a firepit– isn't fire beautiful? There was hot chocolate and cider and cookies and brownies – aren't those things amazing? We laughed and chatted about the weather and stayed warm and said hello and then we sang a few carols, about angels and shepherds and Christmas trees and silver bells, and it all ended with Silent Night. It was quiet, and warm, and people were together. There is so much beauty in the world, even when bad news swirls around. So much beauty in the world.

I drove out to Falcon Lake earlier this week to ski for an afternoon, and I had to stop the car and get out and see all these spruce trees, heavy with snow, standing there together bearing witness to their creator. There's so much beauty in the world.

And there's music, and art, and good books, and interesting things on Netflix, and there's running around in the snow or sitting inside where it's warm if that sits better with you....there's so much more to the world than a virus and there's so much beauty in the world that just speaks more loudly sometimes. Sometimes even if you or I feel like we can't keep on we see that there's so much that keeps on...and there's so much beauty in the world.

Here's a Christmas story I don't think you've heard: A handful of us sat in the basement of a church on the west side of Saskatoon, in what is one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Canada. We were at a downtown ministry where Val was the pastor, and a dozen or so of us sat there in a circle for Christmas Eve worship.

The assistant in the service offered an opening prayer that went like this: "I thank you God for all these people, for you brought everyone here and you made this gathering. I thank you for the sermon you have given me to deliver, for you gave me those words and gave them for all these people you brought here." She spoke with such certainty that everything happening there had its source in God. She did serious and important work in that community, and she always had a Desmond Tutu-ish kind of grin and laugh. Or maybe Desmond Tutu had an Ethel-ish kind of grin and laugh.

In the circle was a man about my age whose name was Kevin. He was an on-and-off regular there. He lived on-and-off the street, and he may or may not have been quite sober that night – which could be the case at any number of Christmas Eve services anywhere. He was quiet and just kind of going along with things and then right in the middle of a reading from Isaiah he sat up straight and said, “Hey! Jesus made all of this, didn’t he? Jesus made all of this!” Awkward silence, and then the service continued.

But he had just said the most beautiful thing: whether he was thinking of it or not – and I think he was - his words came straight out of this reading we just heard from the Gospel of John today. John’s Gospel doesn’t have any stories about Jesus’ birth to set the whole thing in motion. He just has what sounds like complicated philosophical talk that seems like it needs some explaining, and then this: “All things came into being through the Word, through Christ, through Jesus, and without him not one thing came into being.” That’s something we miss, isn’t it? In the midst of one kind of beauty - all the mangers and the carols and the candles and whatever sentiment goes along with that – there’s this other kind of beauty, this baby, whose birth we celebrate, and keep on celebrating until Thursday - is the one through whom everything that is has come into being.

And this young man named Kevin – so much beauty in the world! – preached that sermon for us. So a handful of people, mostly poor with a few middle class ones thrown in, in a church basement in Westside Saskatoon, or in the West End of Winnipeg – it has come into being through Christ, the Word, the Creator of All, the baby. A few people singing in the parking lot, a bigger bunch of

them singing in the living room while a service streams from an empty church...these gatherings of people come together and have life through Christ, the Word, the Creator of All, the baby. Because Christ, the Word, brings to life so much beauty in the world. That's the Christmas message we miss sometimes. There is not one thing anywhere that has come into being apart from Christ. Everything has its source in Christ. It doesn't mean that God inflicts viruses, it doesn't mean that God makes suffering, but it does mean that where anything is happening, Jesus - through whom all things come into being - is there. Living among us.

The good news today – and this will be a double negative for any language nerds like me, but that's OK – the good news is that there is nowhere where Christ is not.

And maybe the really good news is that Christ will be there – there's so much beauty in the world – in all the times to come. There will be more songs around fires, there are always Desmond Tutus, famous and unknown, even in this big virtual room who insist that God's love and the world's justice and equality are for all the colours of people and all the orientations and initials and types of people. There will be beauty to match the trees being heavy with snow because Christ, the Word, through whom all things are made, will keep on making... There's no world, even a world filled with a virus we just can't keep ahead of, where God will not be found in gatherings of people, in bread and wine on a communion table or a kitchen table or even at a dinner party with friends.

This gift of Christmas, in these last few days of the feast, doesn't really hearken back to a Little Town of Bethlehem or a Silent Night (even though those

are two of my favourite things!). We remember and maybe we look back, but there's something more than remembering going on. Christmas pulls us forward. It pulls us into a future where Christ is at the centre of everything, just like now, even if it's hard to see, sometimes. It pulls us into a future where we will still be able to say "There's so much beauty in the world." Because the one through whom all things have come into being will still be among us, bringing all things into being. Or to put it like normal people might, "The one who made it all will still be making it all."

Christmas pulls us into a future that will not look like the past, but it will still be where Christ, the Word of God, lives among us, and where Christ's spirit will continue to breathe among us, to breathe over everything God has made, to renew the whole creation, to give life. To keep on making, stubbornly, lovingly, joyfully, so much beauty in the world.

AMEN.