**Good, But Not Safe**

How do you feel when someone says to you,

*“I’d like a word with you?”*

You make a time to meet for the following day and for 24 hours you sweat it out, thinking what on earth the person will have to say.

* Does he have good news or bad?
* Will he find fault with something I’ve done?
* Will he ask me for a favour that is going to cost me money and effort?
* Maybe he wants to give me something – a gift, an invitation to dinner.
* If this is happening at work, perhaps he wants to talk about a promotion - or tell me that I had better find alternative employment.

You have to wait until the appointed time to find out.

Today, on the day when we are all still excited about Christmas presents, visiting relatives and friends,

God says to us:

***I want to have a Word with you.***

What on earth does God want to speak to us about?

The Word that God wants to have with us is quite different to what the boss might mean.

The Word that God has for us is not the kind of word that we find in the dictionary –

 not the word that can be translated from one language to another.

 **It is a unique Word, and God is offering it to us now.**

It is Jesus Christ, Son of God from eternity.

The Gospel writer calls Jesus “The Word”.

**“The Word became flesh and lived among us.**

**We saw his glory,**

**glory as of the one and only Son of the Father,**

**full of grace and truth”.**

This summarizes what Christmas is all about. It tells us that the Word, **Jesus**, has chosen to become a human being.

A great film to see during these final days of the year is

***The******Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe****,* based on the book of the same title by C. S. Lewis.

If you are familiar with Lewis’ book, you may recall the scene where the four children - Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy - having entered Narnia - become the dinner guests,

of Mr. and Mrs. Beaver.

Mr. Beaver tells them of **Aslan** and he wants the children to meet him.

He describes Aslan “as the

**King of the wood and the son of the**

**great Emperor-beyond-the-Sea”**

 and asks a question, stern and rhetorical,

**“Don’t you know who is the King of Beasts?**

**Aslan is a lion – the great Lion.”**

The Aslan of whom Mr. Beaver speaks with such respect is the story’s central character, the Saviour of that world –

the Christ of Narnia.

Knowing something about lions, Lucy wonders aloud whether this lion is safe, and Mr. Beaver answers her.

**“Who said anything about safe?**

**‘Course he isn’t safe.**

**But he’s good.  He’s the King, I tell you.”**

Good, but not safe.  Not safe, but good.  This contrast describes the one whose birth brings us to church today, Christ the Lord.  Good, but not safe.  Not safe, but good.

**Christ is not safe.**

 Tyrants understand this, often better than believers.

Herod turns fearful to the core when travellers from the east come inquiring about a new-born king of the Jews.

He thought this royal title was his alone,

and a new-born he is not.

There must be an intruder, an interloper, some threat to his control at large in the countryside.

So he arranges the slaughter, genocide,

of all the baby boys in Bethlehem.

Decades later,

 Stephen preaches Jesus as the messiah who subverts everyone’s expectations, reigns from a cross of shame, refuses to stay dead.

This sermon makes the authorities **murderously** uneasy.

Like Jesus, Stephen, as he dies, prays that his killers be forgiven.  Last Tuesday was his feast.

**Jesus is not safe.**

He asks for all that we are.  He offers all that he is.

The deal’s entirely in our favour – what a bargain – yet how reluctant we are to take it.

He points us to the cross but is the first to climb it.

He demands we live by grace, then buys it with his blood.

He is not safe, but he is good.

Passionate and demanding is this goodness,

like lovers on their wedding night.

We nail it to a cross, hide it away in a tomb,

we insult it through a thousand quibbling qualifications,

and even dare to make it dull.

Yet this goodness resurrects time and again,

refusing to stay dead, but interfering in our lives,

our circumstances, our relationships, our politics,

our past and future and our present.

This goodness, insistent and incessant,

places demands upon us,

* forgiving before we repent,
* calling us higher,
* drawing us deeper,
* inviting us to a banquet of love,
* beckoning us to a festival of peace,
* embracing us in a bear-hug of mercy.

This goodness will not leave us alone to rot by ourselves.

This goodness will not leave us alone.

And so, God became a human being and came to us as a vulnerable baby – to live among us.

The story about John Rosen is a good illustration of what it means for God “*to live among us”*. John Rosen was a doctor in a psychiatric hospital.

Unlike all the other doctors who were aloof and separate from their patients, he moved into the ward with them.

He placed his bed among their beds. He lived the life they must live. Day to day he shared it. **He loved them.**

If they didn’t talk, he didn’t talk either.

It’s as if he understood what was happening.

He was just there, and that communicated something to the patients that they hadn’t heard for years –

somebody understood them.

But then he did something else. **He put his arms around them and hugged them.**

This doctor with a string of letters after his name, this highly skilled, highly paid physician, who was like God to the patient,

held those unattractive, unlovable, sometimes incontinent persons, and **loved** them back into life.

Often, when patients who had been unable to speak said their first words, they were **“thank you”.**

In plain and simple language, isn’t that what God did,

through Jesus, at Christmas?

 Jesus has come and lived in our world.

He has become part of our life of confused priorities –

of aching bodies - torn and bleeding spirits –

of heartbreak and loneliness.

Christmas tells us God is not aloof and separate from our world.  **He is in the world with us.**

 He has come to hug us and hold us tight even though our sinful nature makes us unattractive and unlovable.

This is the special time of the year when we celebrate the birth of our Saviour in Bethlehem.

We enjoy seeing the children present the nativity play and delight in their very simple understanding of the events of Christmas.

But, too often we don’t go any further than the simple story. We miss out on the real significance of these events.

Christmas is the celebration of God becoming **one of us**,

a fact that we can never fully grasp, and living on this earth with all the pain, the suffering, the human tragedies, the sin and dying - Jesus came into the thick of everything.

In the midst of our agonies in this life we are not alone:

* In Jesus, God is with us when we are depressed and hurting and sick.
* In Jesus, God is with us when we are hit with bad news.
* In Jesus, God is with us when we feel guilty and ashamed.
* In Jesus, God is with us when we are worried about someone we love.
* In Jesus, God is with us when we are caught up in a chain of events that we are powerless to prevent.
* In Jesus, God laughs when we laugh,
* In Jesus, God weeps when we weep,
* and God dances when we dance for joy.

The good news of Christmas is that God hasn’t kept to himself separate from all of troubles and all of the pain but he has come right here into the middle of it all.

 He truly is Immanuel – ***God is with us*.**

So, let’s be silent and listen to our heart.

Mary’s child has just been born - there in the darkness –

 there on the straw. His lungs fill with air,

 and he cries out loud and long.

What we hear is not only a new-born’s wailing.

It is a lion’s roar.

**OUR ASLAN HAS COME.**