

The Stranger

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[0 : 00] This, I put the text up here because we haven't got it on a piece of paper for you today. It's made up of the three sort of simple statements. He was in the world.

The world was made by him. The world knew him not. And those are the three statements I want to talk about today. I am the proud recipient as a resident of Quadra of a season's reading from John Turner, MC.

You will remember him. And he was... He's a public man, a public trustee, so to speak. And he's speaking publicly to all his constituents in this. And he suggests he, he, is seriously concerned to convey to us the season's greetings, holiday greetings, to trust we will all enjoy the festival of family and friends, and that the whole season will be marked by a spirit of generosity and goodwill.

And for those who don't believe any of that, he says, as far as he's printed on recycled paper. But I believe it.

[1 : 33] I think that's about as far as any public official can do, any public person, conveying what we regard as public truth.

And the public truth about Christmas is that it's a special season, the season of the winter solstice. It's a special holiday. It's certainly a festival of family and friends. And we hope that it will be marked as this very noon hour has shown by a spirit of generosity and goodwill.

So, that's as far as a public trustee can go. Beyond that, if you go beyond that, you bog down in the realm of private spiritual values for which you would be burned at the ballot box as a heretic, if you profess anything beyond that.

And so you can't do it. Now, I am dependent upon the possibility that there may be some truth in Christmas beyond the orthodoxy of public truth or public opinion.

[2 : 53] And I would like to contend that the orthodoxy, the reality which is beyond the season's greetings, the holiday, the festival of family and friends, and the spirit of generosity and goodwill is that the reason is he was in the world, the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

And I want to talk to you a little bit about those three statements today. Now, when you talk about the world, the world that we're talking about is a world which has a turnip, and it's a world in which there are turnips.

And turnips respond to a lot of things. They respond to sunshine. They respond to rain. They respond to wind. They're fairly responsive creatures.

And they're a part of our world and part of the great vegetable kingdom. And the vegetable kingdom responds at a very simple and primitive level.

A process even of reproduction is carried on. But I don't think the turnip gets emotionally involved in it, particularly the way we do. So, that's the world into which he came.

[4 : 25] The second aspect of that, I can't think how to do it, but that's a grizzly bear. And this is a world of turnips and grizzly bears.

And grizzly bears are capable of much more complex response. They have a need of food. They are subject to fear.

They get very involved in reproduction. They create homes. They look after their young. They travel according to instincts that seem to have been built in them over a long period of time.

So, that in the world into which he came, Jesus came, there are grizzly bears. And grizzly bears respond at a certain level. Now, the thought is, you see, that it is also the world of people.

And that people are capable of a great deal more response than either a turnip or a grizzly bear.

That somehow there is something different. I know that science is trying to find out the secret about humanity by studying turnips and grizzly bears.

[5 : 38] But we still think that there is perhaps something more than that, the human beings. In fact, that it's possible that human beings can respond to God.

And that human beings are creatures who are caught in time and space and history and in particular social and cultural structures.

And that they are capable of responding to him who was in the world. He was in the world.

And this was the world which is capable of a level of response to the God who created him.

That's the great contention. In the public realm, that is not possible. But privately, you are allowed to believe that you are capable of responding to God.

[6 : 42] That the God in whom we believe is a God who came into the world. And he came into the world to demonstrate what a perfect response to God would look like.

And the story of his life is the story of the perfect response to God from a human point of view. And so when you get to know him, then you can begin to understand, at least in a little way, of what it means that you too are in the world.

And that you too are capable of response to God. I mean, that's what he demonstrates to us. The next thing it says about him is that the world was made by him.

Now, we know that there is something wrong with our world. You know, and we're not quite sure what it is.

But it's comparable to mathematics, which says that 2 plus 2 equals 5. Now, if you've always been told that 2 plus 2 equals 5, if you've always done your arithmetic on that basis, if you've never considered any other possibility, if you're totally committed to it, that 2 plus 2 equals 5, it means that a 50 cent cup of coffee is only worth 40 cents.

[8 : 15] It also means that when you're 40, you're actually 50. Some of you may feel that. But it's a complex world because there's something wrong.

Almost all the people know that in our world there is something wrong, but it's very difficult to define it. You can't pick up the newspaper. You can't watch television.

You can't get involved in our society and in our culture without this vague, niggly feeling back behind it all that there's something wrong. Even when you get to the point where you've got it all. You've made it. All your victory is robbed from you by the pervasive awareness that there's something wrong. You don't know what it is.

So if you want to find out what it is, you pretty well have to go back to the one who made it. Who made the world.

[9 : 15] If you want to understand how the world is meant to be put together, you've got to go back to him. And what you get when you get back there is something like this.

That's an attempt to portray for you something that is totally unimaginable, totally undefinable, which has no existence but its own existence.

that is an attempt to try and put onto paper the ultimate mystery, which is totally inconceivable by the human mind.

You see what I mean? You do, you don't. Now, what happens here when it says the world was made by him, what happens is that out of this comes the word.

That's all we know. The unfathomable mystery of the nature and character of God finds expression in the word.

[10 : 44] And this passage says that the world was made by the word. In other words, this word, as it says, in the beginning was with God and in the beginning was God, but this word was spoken so that out of the unfathomable mystery comes the reality of the word.

That word is Jesus Christ. And the world was made by him. Now, you know, in our scientific world, that's very difficult even to begin to comprehend.

What does it mean that the world was made by the word? What could it possibly mean? How could we possibly, at the level of our intellectual understanding, having done all the philosophy that we've done, having done all the anthropology and the archaeology and having examined all the ancient origins of human history and human culture and the whole sort of vastness of the universe, how can we come out with such a simple statement of a few words that the world was made through him or by him?

what lies behind it is that the world, as we understand it, is a measurable quantity.

But where it comes from, as I have tried to illustrate, is totally immeasurable and totally incomprehensible so that it's very difficult for us how to deal with it.

[12 : 35] All we can deal with is what we've been allowed to know and what we've been allowed to know is because the world, because God has spoken in Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ he has created the world.

Now, the world was made by him. I'm getting in pretty deep, aren't I? And I sure won't get out before one door.

So, you'll know the necessity of tantalizing you with this, but I, but what I'm, all I want to really try and demonstrate to you is that the world is light which comes out of unfathomable darkness. You know, I mean, and you know how even a match can be seen against totally unfathomable darkness, one match.

So that the word comes out of this, that out of a silence which is so deep that we could never possibly penetrate it and suddenly out of the depth of silence comes three notes of music and all the silence is somehow given expression to in three notes of music.

[14 : 00] How out of total chaos and total disorder as far as our mind is concerned comes order. How out of oblivion, total oblivion and meaninglessness comes life.

And you will know that one of the things that appears to be wrong with our world is that we want, that the light seems to be being overtaken by the darkness, that the music seems to be being silenced, that the order is giving away to chaos and we firmly believe that life dissolves into oblivion. You know, we're trying to reverse the process. But when it says the world was made by him, that gives direction to the process. And ultimately, when you get to know him, you know that the purpose of the world is infinitely greater than anything we've ever begun to imagine.

And so, that's what it means when it makes the simple statement, the world was made by him. What it's like is, you see, he's trying to take, if you take the vastness of God and then you look at the vastness of the Pacific Ocean as a kind of illustration of that, and then you look at an aquarium. Well, the relationship between God and the Pacific is sort of like the relationship between the Pacific Ocean in its full extent and the aquarium on the hall table.

[15 : 42] That's it. And that's all we know. We know the aquarium. But how could we ever know the Pacific Ocean? Or how could we ever know that ultimate and greater mystery, which is, where did the Pacific Ocean come from?

Whose idea was that? time. So that's the kind of position that we're in. We look at the vastness of eternity and that vastness of eternity is measured out to us in teaspoons and we get sort of 60 or 70 teaspoons and that's it.

You know, tiny little bit that we can absorb of time into our life compared to the whole stretch of time. time. And so when it says that the world was made through him, we begin to see that the vastness of a God who is totally incomprehensible has chosen to make himself known in the person who was in the world and by whom the world was made.

We don't understand time. We don't understand space. I mean, we don't know why we are locked into such a small portion of time. We don't know why we're locked in to a little bit of space which we can become familiar with.

And so most people when you get as old as I am, they start traveling, thinking there may be some answers. And so they go to the ends of the world to see if there isn't something in space that makes it all make sense.

[17 : 12] And presumably there is something that helps, but I don't think it solves the ultimate problem. We know that love is necessary and we can't love. We know that you have to live by faith, but the reality is fear.

And so you get that kind of question and you get it because you see what is wrong with the world is that the world doesn't know him.

There is the mystery and the mystery is very close to all of us. One young fellow in blue jeans and jack boots and a long beard and long hair came to me the other day and he says, I think you in the church are a bunch of pious quacks, pious liars, he called them.

And I said, I think so too and I think you're one of them. So I just said he'd feel included. But you see what he said to me was he says, you talk about an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

I don't even begin to know what that means. That's totally incomprehensible to me. How could a person have an intimate relationship with God? And I think that's how could an aquarium know what the Pacific Ocean is like?

[18 : 38] Or how could you follow that sequence out? We don't know. And there surrounds us this tremendous question of the mystery of who I am.

I don't even know who I am. As my friend Walker Percy says, you could know more about a constellation in outer space than you can know about yourself.

And it's not an unusual thing when you've been married about ten years that your wife will turn to you and say, I don't even know you.

And she's right. But because of the mystery of our own personality, which we know very little about, you know, who is this guy with the big ears, the big feet.

And who is he? I don't know. And I see young people like you coming along to me and treating me with great veneration.

[19 : 47] When I first went to the university and they started on missions and things and they started to call me sir, I wondered who they were looking at. because the mystery of who we are is extremely profound.

How do we deal with that mystery? The mystery of our own existence. And the mystery that leads so often to us feeling, well, if anybody really knew who I was, they would despise me.

And so I've got to maintain an appearance so that people will like me in spite of the fact that they might get to know me. So there you have the mystery, you see.

But the mystery is solvable only in terms of Jesus Christ. When the Old Testament came along, the great thing was, here is the law and you are to obey it.

When the New Testament comes along, the whole proposition is different. Here is Jesus Christ and you are to recognize him. And you are to recognize him as the one who was in the world historically, broke into the time and space world at Christmas, and the world was made by him.

[21 : 08] That the whole understanding of the world is dependent upon knowing him. And the whole understanding of yourself is dependent upon knowing him. So when you come to know Jesus Christ, you make the first step towards solving the mystery of who you are.

Because who you are is locked in the mind of him by whom you were made, by whom the whole world was created. And that has been revealed to you because he was in the world.

And so these three amazing statements end up with saying, as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, the sons and daughters.

You see, because we receive him. And what our world is, and you know, when I say that we live in a two plus two equals five world, is that we live in a vast social and political conspiracy, which has as its purpose to reject him, not to acknowledge who he is.

And so when somebody comes to acknowledge who he is, that's an extraordinary thing. It should be the most ordinary thing in the world because he was in the world, the world was made by him, so the world should know him.

[22 : 36] But it doesn't. And the problem that has to be overcome, the challenge to all of us at the level of response, response, more than a turnip and more than a grizzly bear.

The level of response is to respond to him by whom the world was made and who broke into time and history to reveal what the nature of our response to God should be.

So that's where we have to come to at Christmas, is that recognition. and just to say to you at the close of this, that I would like you to have, I would like to wish to you season's greetings.

I would like to say I hope you enjoy your family and your friends. I hope you will put out lights to dispel the darkness on your street. I hope you will be generous. I hope you will show goodwill.

I hope you will recycle your Christmas cards and share your Christmas turkey. but if someone asks you why, which is a question we're not allowed to ask, if someone asks you why, then you say because he was in the world, Jesus Christ.

[23 : 57] The world was made by him and I have received him as my Savior and Lord.

I have accepted him as the one in whom God has revealed himself to me and in whom I have begun to discover who I am as a person.

Let me pray. God, as we come again to this annual festival of light, when in fact we flee into the darkness, us, we ask that you will help us to come to terms with the fact that Jesus Christ is the one who was in the world, the world was made by him and our world doesn't know him.

We would ask that you would give us grace, that our hearts may be open to receive him and not to be ashamed. We ask in his name.

Amen.