

Christmas Eve: Changing the World Covertly

December 24, 2006 by Ken Wilson

What if God wanted to change the world? How would he go about it?

He could if he wanted change the world by changing the laws of nature so if you stayed out in the sun too long you wouldn't get burned.

He could change the world by imposing his will on everyone who had one of their own.

Though sweet on the tongue this might sour in the stomach. If God changed the laws of nature, the world wouldn't be free to be itself anymore; by imposing his will on us, we wouldn't be free to be ourselves. And without freedom love is an impossibility and God is love so he won't do that.

Which leaves the third, slow boat to China, option. God changes the world by **persuading** us to see the world differently than we do so our way in the world changes.

How does God go about changing the world in this way?

As strange as it seems he goes about it **surreptitiously**, covertly, by telling us a story, because stories in the end rule the world.

God has been telling us a story since the time we started listening to stories. It's essentially this: He wants to make a home on earth; will us earthlings make room for him? That's the story unfolding in real time.

The story took a **dramatic turn** when an angel announced to a young woman that God wants a home in humanity as his landing pad on earth. This would require an unusual conception: would she say yes to such a thing?

The woman, named Mary, said, "**Let it be done to me according to your word.**" (Luke 1: 38) And John tells us what came as a result of that simple act of cooperation: "**And the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us**" (John 1:14)

Beginning with her own womb Mary made a home for God on earth. She received him. That was her part when it was her turn. We each have a part in the story when it comes our turn.

We're only here because room in a woman was made for us. And room was made in some version of a family; hopefully with warmth and love but at least with enough to survive. And room was made in a wider community and room was made for us on earth.

God, unbelievably, has now chosen the same path. The drama playing out in our lives is the drama playing out in his.

How, we might ask, does this begin to change the world?

Because the son born to Mary has been telling us our receiving the **vulnerable** constitutes our receiving the **all-powerful**. This was the punch line of his final story in the gospel of Matthew, the parable of the sheep and the goats: ***"Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you? When did we see you thirsty and give you drink, naked and clothe you, sick and care for you, a stranger and take you in, locked up in a prison and visit you?"***

"Whatever you did or did not to the least of these my brothers and sisters you did or did not to me."

Convinced of this, we begin to see every human being with bi-focal vision: one eye on them, the other eye on him, knowing he wants a home on earth and our receiving them counts as our receiving him.

Last week we talked about how this shapes the mission of the church: if we're not putting flesh to this--doing some good for the least, last, lost--we're more like a Christian club than a Jesus community, our gospel an irrelevant entry on the menu of self improvement schemes. If the church is the bearer of good news, we must become good for something beyond just caring for ourselves because the gospel is a personal, social, global message of transformation.

But it starts with Mary and Joseph and their newborn baby.

We sometimes forget Mary & Joseph literally fed Jesus when he was hungry, gave him something to drink when he was thirsty, wrapped him in swaddling clothes when he was naked, cared for him when he was most vulnerable and couldn't care for himself. The answer for the exam at the end of it all was revealed at the beginning of it all: *feed, clothe and care for the needy.*

Every baby is to be loved like this: one eye on the baby, the other on God, knowing God wants a home on earth and our receiving them counts as our receiving him.

Whenever we see another human being with this bi-focal vision, we become the children of God, the kind of people who change the world.

What if we perceived people in our workplace with this kind of vision? We might pause and listen more.

I remember a time when I found myself **miserable** at work one day. Something or other had happened to make me miserable. Could have been anything. I walked into Don's office and just **sighed**. He was at his desk, phone headphones on, working his computer, but he heard my sigh, and got off the phone, turned from his computer and said, "**Tough day?**"

And he was looking at me straight on, not distracted. So I sat down and unpacked my misery. God bless him, Don didn't add to it by telling me how to think about the situation so I wouldn't feel miserable. He didn't offer unsolicited advice for making myself **unmiserable**. He just asked a few questions I could tell were honestly designed to help him understand my misery. He did what I needed at that moment: he **commiserated** with me. He made enough contact with my misery so it wouldn't fall so heavily on me and I was no longer alone with it.

That simple deed probably kept me from adding to world's misery by taking mine out on it. **These are the pebbles dropped into the pond of the world to ripple out and change it.**

So today as we celebrate our Savior's birth, by all means lets sing, "O Come Let Us Adore Him, O Come Let Us Adore Him" but as we do, let's remember: our adoring Him means loving those flesh & blood, great & grimy, crawling-walking, laughing-weeping, depressing-delighting, amazing-annoying, **image of God bearing beings** we bump into every day.