

Christmas Eve/Day 2024 All Souls' **Being Real** dtw

Following the abridged story of the *Velveteen Rabbit*... read with children out the front near the crib. "What is 'Real'?" he asked the Skin Horse...

Tonight/today, we gather to celebrate the glory of what it means to be REAL. To be real is to know that 'God so loved' us. I dedicated a book to a man who used the expression, 'the blissful certainty of being wanted'. That is our core need as human beings- not always fulfilled, sadly, because of human sinfulness – but always fulfilled in the gift of Christ to our world. To be loved, to be wanted, to be authentic, real human beings of course, involves being vulnerable. God loved this fragmented world so much that he made himself totally vulnerable in the birth at Bethlehem, that we might experience a quality of life that Jesus called 'eternal life'.

Some were greatly delighted and honoured by this Christmas gift – others terribly offended. This, God's greatest gift was despised, rejected, snubbed, as others in their superiority and falsehood criticised his style of radical love. He too faced loneliness, often with 'nowhere to lay his head'. He was made to feel so insignificant as they sought to humiliate him, wear him down and crucify him. But because his love was so REAL, so AUTHENTIC, he endured the cross, accepting the shame – that you and I might rise to a higher level of being. The first disciples of Jesus were released into a newness of life and love following his resurrection, with a new purpose and hope for living even though they too became misunderstood, persecuted, martyred. **THEY WERE SO ALIVE IN CHRIST!**

Sometimes I get the feeling that Christians today expect life to be mainly rosy because they love God and that they'll not be hurt, or got at, or have some edges knocked off (hair worn off!). But tonight/today, we celebrate one who has come into this world, who knows his way around our torn and troubled world, who was bruised and wounded beyond belief and yet who displayed a staggering quality of forgiveness and love. This is real love, love that conquers all, love that rises to greater things, as he is risen – greater than the present Holy Land, than terror, than Ukraine and so many other war-torn places.

Yes, the real Christian, the real human, knows what it means to be vulnerable, who can understand hurt as well as joy, and who can bounce back when the going gets tough. As you look back over this year, perhaps you have experienced a disappointment in your work or school,

or in a relationship, a sickness, death, or tragedy in your family, or you are perplexed at the state of this world of ours. The renewal of God's gift of love in Christ to you this night/morning is there to remind you that a purpose and a joy is prepared for you and this world beyond our wildest dreams. (Just ask that rabbit!)s You are loved and infinitely precious. Christmas is here to remind us, thank God, that it is still a beautiful world, that the light is greater than the darkness, the hope is greater than the despair. That light and hope and love came, O so simply in the stable at Bethlehem. It comes again tonight, O so simply in bread and wine and in the praises of his people. In Worship, Word and Sacrament we affirm Christ's REAL PRESENCE – he himself said it – “this is my body, this is my blood”.

Reach out and accept this precious gift, discover what it means to be a new creation in Christ, to be alive and to be real. And may Christmas live forever in your heart.