

Sermon 10 August 2025 (Sunday before moving into new church)

Revelation 21:1-7 John 1:1-9

'In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God.' John 1:1. John certainly begins his gospel with a punch. In that one verse he makes not just one authoritative statement, but actually three. So before we look at how this all relates to our circumstances today as we prepare to move into our new church, on the threshold of new beginnings, let's take a moment to examine the significance of John's words.

'In the beginning the Word already existed.' The Word, of course, refers to Jesus. John is saying that Jesus has always been there with God. It has echoes of Genesis 1:1, *'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.'* God was there before creation, because in the end he was responsible for starting the ball rolling; he was responsible for creation itself. Today is about celebrating new beginnings. We are about to move from the old to the new. John moves from a beginning as expressed in the Old Testament to a beginning in the context of the New Testament, which of course embraces Christ. He is saying Christ has always been there as part of God.

'The Word was with God.' In those few words, John makes the point that there has always been the closest of connections with God, and that of course, is how we have come to a new understanding of God. I say new because our understanding of God as portrayed in the New Testament is so very different as portrayed in the Old Testament, which is pre-Jesus. God in the Old Testament is seen as quite vengeful, to say the least. One little girl, when confronted with some of the bloodthirsty parts of the Old Testament, commented, 'Well, that was before God became a Christian.' What John is saying is that God and Christ have always been very closely connected but it wasn't until Christ came into our world that we understood this.

'And the Word was God.' This very simply lies at the heart of our Christian belief – that God comes to us in the human form and figure of Christ. That, my friends, is the nub of the matter. It is from that belief that we get our understanding of God; it is that belief that is our source of strength, encouragement and perseverance; it is from that belief that we get our sense of mission, and that leads me on to our situation today.

As I have just said, today is about acknowledging and celebrating new beginnings. And very significantly, this is about passing from the old to the new. We intend to acknowledge and celebrate that at our consecration service on Sunday 31 August. I quote from our first reading, *'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared.'* Revelation 21:1. So 'the old heaven and the new earth had disappeared.' Well, they might have disappeared, but I want to make this point - the old is very important, because that is our history. We are shaped and moulded by our history. Think of all that has taken place in that beautiful old church of ours. That is very much part of who we are and I want to acknowledge that history. I want to give thanks for that history. Apart from anything else, the dream of a new church had its genesis, its birth in the setting and the ongoing participation in worship taking place there. I give thanks for that.

So now let's focus on the new: *'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.'* Today we look forward to new beginnings. As we prepare to inhabit this wonderful worship space, this tremendous complex, the question we have to ask ourselves is, How are we going to use this wonderful space to further God's kingdom? The answer, my friends, is not simple and straightforward, and will undoubtedly involve numerous strands. There will be many moving parts involved. But one thing that is quite certain – the onus lies with each and every one of us as individuals. We all have a part to play, and as I have emphasised countless times, if we all play our part, then we will undoubtedly reflect something of God's kingdom here on our patch. As Paul says in Romans 12:4, *'Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.'*

I go back to that quote from our gospel reading, *'And the Word was God,'* and I repeat what I said, that it is from this belief that we get our sense of mission. We believe that God lives in Jesus. Now, we also believe that God is part of every one of us. As I have said, he is our spiritual dimension, something we all have but not everyone acknowledges or taps into, but it is there, or should I say, he is there. So,

the logical inference from that is Christ also lives within us. Now if we truly believe this, and if we really want to honour this belief, then our lives must reflect this.

There is the story of a group of salesmen from Milwaukee, USA, who went to sales convention in Chicago. They assured their wives that they would be home in plenty of time for dinner. But with one thing and another, the meeting ran overtime, and the men had to race to the station in order to catch their train. As they barged through the terminal, one man inadvertently knocked over a table supporting a basket of apples. Without stopping, all the men reached the train and boarded it with a sigh of relief. All but one man. He paused, as he was overcome with a feeling of guilt over what happened to the boy whose apple stand they had knocked over. He waved goodbye to his friends and returned to the terminal. He was glad he did. The ten-year-old boy was blind.

The salesman gathered up the apples and noticed several of them were bruised. He reached into his wallet and said to the boy, 'Here, take this ten dollars for the damage we have done. I am terribly sorry and I hope it won't spoil your day.'

As he walked away, the blind boy called after him, 'Sir, are you Jesus?' The man stopped in his tracks, and he thought about that.

If we want to do justice to this wonderful place we are about to move into, then the onus lies fairly and squarely with each one of us. If as individuals our lives reflect that belief that Christ lives within us, that his spirit is our driving force, then there is no doubt that we will go a long way towards not only fulfilling our mission as defined by our faith, but we will also in our own way make a contribution to the furthering of God's kingdom here in Flat Bush. Let me further illustrate with another story, a parable.

Once upon a time, there was a fish who lived in a stagnant pool. Breathing was so difficult that it was fast becoming a desperate situation. He decided to call his friends together and brave the unknown to find more liveable waters.

Their journey was not easy but in the end they were successful when they chanced upon a gently flowing brook. 'This is where we must make our home,' said the fish. 'And to make sure that we do not lose what we have found, we must safeguard it.' Together, they found enough materials and debris to make a carefully closed-in compound for themselves. 'What we have now is safe,' they exclaimed.

Unfortunately, they had boxed themselves in far too well, so that in the end they all died from lack of oxygen.

Now, I am not suggesting for one moment that here at St Paul's in the Park, we are stagnant. Heaven forbid! But if we are to do justice to our belief and to our new complex we have been blessed with, to do justice to ourselves as a church that accepts the challenge to spread God's light throughout our local community, then we cannot be a closed community ourselves, but rather we need to reach out beyond our walls, our confines in order to touch the lives of as many people as possible. That should be our mission, both on a personal level but also as a church.

I finish with a quote from Oprah Winfrey: *'There is no greater gift you can give or receive than to honour your calling. It's how you become truly alive.'* My friends, we have received our calling.