



I. Palpable Proximity

TRANSCRIPT OF VIDEO

Nothing really brought it home to me better than reading an NBC news item about the *International Brotherhood of Real Bearded Santas*. I am not joking this is a real organization in the US. In the article, one Real Santa lamented, that due to the pandemic, “Kids this year will be moving from Santa’s “lap” to “laptops.” In other words, 2020 will be the “Year of the virtual Santas!”

As Christmas hovers around the corner, it is going to be a new experience. A time of separation for many of us due to the pandemic, and that includes Shammi and me. Like Santa and the kids, we too will be exchanging only electronic endearments and cyber cuddles with our loved ones!

But, let’s pause a moment and think this through. Is physical proximity everything? Or is there something more to being closely connected? Things that make proximity both palpable and truly tangible?

Let me explain. Can you relate to times and situations where we have lived under the same roof with a person and yet experienced a distance that seems like we are continents away? Where while physical proximity is present, emotional, intellectual and relational closeness is absent. That kind of separation to me is much more palpably painful, than any physical separation where the other three elements are very present.

So, while this pandemic has kept us physically separated, many have been more closely connected in other ways with our near and dear ones. And may I add, much more frequently than they were in pre-pandemic times. Has that been true for you?

While there are some moments of longing to be physically together, the fact that Shammi and I enjoy emotional, intellectual and relational proximity with our key family members and friends is a great source of joy during this physical separation.

Two thousand years ago, a similar physical separation took place, something that makes our 2020 separation pale into almost total insignificance.

The Son of God, the co-creator of the universe, left His heavenly home, separating Himself physically from the rest of the Holy Trinity. During this physical separation, the infinite Son of God experienced the limits of space, time and life as we know it. If these months of pandemic separation has troubled us, let’s spare a thought for the 30 plus years of physical separation Jesus experienced on earth. You see, Jesus could have incarnated as fully-grown adult, just as Adam was created to reduce the years of His separation, but He didn’t.

Instead, Jesus left heaven, and encountered our ordinary human experiences - love, betrayals, joy, sorrow, praise, criticism, popularity and opposition and more.

Let me reiterate an important point here, Jesus' separation was ONLY physical. His intimacy with God who He affectionately referred to as "Abba" or "Daddy" was constant and consistent. Something, we can emulate with our loved ones with ZOOM and social media.

The question that arises then is, "Why did God the Father let His only begotten Son endure all of this? And equally, "Why did Jesus obediently go along with the plan?"

Let me offer an answer. Put very simply it was "To bring 'Joy to the World'." Let me explain this from a practical dimension and then in its "ultimate dimension."

Jesus brought joy into the world in very practical ways. Every time He healed someone, cast out a demon, fed thousands or turned water into wine - joy was the immediate result.

Jesus also mainstreamed social outcasts in totally counter-cultural ways that replaced their tears with joy. The leper He touched, the adulterous woman He did not condemn, the hated tax collectors He dined with and so on. The world of social outcasts experienced a new 'inexpressible' joy.

But, the ultimate dimension of Jesus bringing "Joy to the world" is something personal to me and most of you.

Jesus explained His life mission very succinctly: "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10)

When He was criticized for spending time with sinners Jesus replied: "I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners and need to repent." (Luke 19:13).

Like all of us, I was both lost and a sinner. Now some of you who have known me for decades may say "I don't think so." But, the fact, is one doesn't need to be totally lost, just a little wayward or off-track is enough to need God. Similarly, I don't need to be a spectacular sinner to be separated from God.

So, Jesus' birth, life, and death for you and me on the cross has offered a link that permanently ends our separation from God. All we need to do is accept His invitation with faith, just as I have.

Yes, Jesus' coming is a joy to the world because it has given us a direct link to get eternally reconnected with God. A link far more in value than the many temporary ZOOM links that have given us joy during the pandemic.

Let's click the ultimate link and accept Jesus' invitation and together join the millions who will be singing this Christmas season "Joy to the World the Lord is come!"

May God bless us all as we await Jesus' second coming!

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