

When Heaven and Earth Kiss

2015 Christmas message from Bishop Bruce R. Ough

One of my favorite images in all of scripture is found in the psalmist's prayer for the restoration of God's favor. The psalmist writes:

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
Righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
And righteousness will look down from the sky.
Psalm 85:10-11 (NRSV)

This is the image of heaven and earth kissing. It is the kiss of righteousness and peace. It is the meeting of love and faithfulness. It is the coming together of heaven and earth.

That is exactly what happened at Christmas – the coming together of heaven and earth. God's love came down from heaven and became fully incarnate in human, earthly form. God's steadfast love and righteousness became fully known in Jesus' faithfulness and peace. Heaven and earth kissed.

Isaiah prophesized that a child would be born to re-establish the beloved community –

- a time in which the earth will be bathed in righteousness;
- a time in which peace will be coupled with justice;
- a time in which steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
- a time in which the people will see a great light.

Listen again to Isaiah's beautiful, poetic prophecy:

For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
And he is named
Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God,
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.

He will establish and uphold it
with justice and righteousness
from this time onward and forever...
Isaiah 9:6-7 (NRSV)

In a baby, born from above and yet birthed in a lowly manger, heaven and earth kissed.

We are the children of this kiss. It is our inheritance of grace. We carry the legacy of this kiss into the world. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit – God within us – we become a part of the incarnation. We are chosen to be and live as the beloved community of Christ. We are called to make every day Christmas Day:

- a day in which love and faithfulness meet;
- a day in which the sacredness of every human being is affirmed;
- a day in which respect and kindness prevail and the fires of animosity, hatred and violence are extinguished;
- a day in which perfect love casts out all fear;
- a day in which there are equal rights and equal access to the resources of God's creation;
- a day in which there is peace with justice;
- a day in which the dividing walls of racism, prejudice and discrimination come tumbling down;
- a day in which every human soul knows the saving love of God;
- a day in which the bondages of slavery, sin and selfishness fall away;
- a day in which Emmanuel – God with us – is every person's everyday reality.

I pray for each of you, your families and your congregations a most joyous Christmas celebration. May God bless you once again as you celebrate the birth of the Christ-child – the kiss of heaven and earth. And, may God's Spirit embolden each of us to carry the joy and blessing of this Christmas kiss into all the world. Emmanuel! God is with us! We are the Beloved Community of Christ!

Merry Christmas!