

2024 Christmas, Midnight and Morning

*The Coming* by R.S.Thomas

And God held in his hand  
A small globe. 'Look' he said.  
The son looked. Far off,  
As through water, he saw  
A scorched land of fierce  
Colour. The light burned  
There; crusted buildings  
Cast their shadows: a bright  
Serpent, A river  
Uncoiled itself, radiant  
With slime.

On a bare  
Hill a bare tree saddened  
The sky. many People  
Held out their thin arms  
To it, as though waiting  
For a vanished April  
To return to its crossed  
Boughs. The son watched  
Them. Let me go there, he said.

I wonder if you can think back to a time when you have held in your hands something fragile. Perhaps a delicate ornament, the petals of a flower, or even someone you love in a moment of pain. (Only Fools and Horses – butterfly scene...?) There's something sacred about those moments: the way they call us to stillness, to attention, to a kind of reverence. They are, as we see this evening, often how the bread and the wine of Holy Communion are held.

R.S. Thomas' poem *The Coming* begins with a similarly sacred moment. Thomas gives us a picture of God holding in His hand a small globe, this fragile world of ours, and says, 'Look.' The Son looks, and what He sees is breathtaking. Not in its beauty, but in its brokenness.

Through the Son's eyes, we see a world that is scorched and fierce. The colours are vivid, but they're harsh. A river winds its way through the land, but it's coated with slime. On a bare hill stands a bare tree, and beneath it, people stretch out thin arms, longing for something they've lost.

It's not a comforting picture but it resonates. The world Thomas describes is our world - a place of suffering and longing, where shadows fall heavy and hope often feels far off. It's a world marked by scorched lands where homes are reduced to rubble in Gaza and rivers polluted. It's a world where barren hills in Syria witness displaced families stretching out arms in longing. It's a world where bare trees mirror the bleakness in Ukraine, where millions have fled their homes seeking refuge. From the comfort of our own community, these might seem distant shadows but they are present realities for many this Christmas. It's a world that seems to ache for restoration, for renewal, for redemption.

The Son watches, not with indifference or despair, but with compassion. And then, in the simplest of words, He says, 'Let me go there.' 'Let me go there'. Into the scorched land, the slimy river, the shadowed hill. 'Let me go there', to the people with thin arms and heavy hearts. 'Let me go there', into the mess and the pain and the longing. It's a response of self-giving love. The very pattern of life that Jesus will live on earth. And it's the heart of what we celebrate at Christmas - 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us'.

Think for a moment about what it means for the Son to say, *'Let me go there.'* Stepping into all the vulnerability of human life; to be born a helpless baby, to grow up in poverty, to face hunger, rejection, suffering, and death. It means entering fully into our experience, not as a distant observer, but as one of us. *'Born the king of angels' yet 'tears and smiles like us he knew'.*

This is the wonder of the incarnation: that God sees our broken world and doesn't turn away. He doesn't stay distant or detached. Instead, He steps into our reality, into our story, to bring healing and hope from within, *'full of grace and truth'.*

And so if God sees the world in all its pain and responds in this way, if the Son looks at our brokenness and says, *'Let me go there'* - then what does that mean for us? What is this message of Christmas...unwrapped?

It means our full humanity is seen. Fully, completely, as we are. It means God knows the places where we're scorched and shadowed, the parts of our lives that feel barren and broken. It means He has come to meet us there - not to condemn, but to save. Not to judge, but to love and to make Himself known in the midst of it all. Not to live a life that is 'successful' or 'powerful' as the world would perceive it. But the light that shines in darkness. And which the darkness can never overcome.

Jesus doesn't come to give us a set of techniques to keep God happy. He doesn't come to give those with curious minds a hobby for Sunday mornings. He comes to make humanity itself new – *'born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth'*. It's not done at a stroke. He comes to dwell with us in flesh and blood, at a particular time in a particular place, to teach us by word and example what it is possible for us to be. Through the life of a learning child, a working adult and a suffering person, to teach us how to be with, and to love one another. To teach us that all people can reflect something of the generosity that

is God's own nature; the generosity which sees God overflow in love for his creation in the birth of our Saviour. *'Let me go there.'*

We are then called to see the world as He does. To notice the suffering around us, the places where people are reaching out in longing. And to respond, not with fear or avoidance, but with love. To say, in our own way, *'Let me go there.'* St John tells us *'we have seen his glory'*. One saint goes on to tell us *'the glory of God is a human being fully alive'* raised to its full stature in striving to imitate Him.

The babe at Bethlehem invites us to see the world through His eyes – to notice its pain, its need, its beauty - and to stretch out our hands in love. This is the miracle of Christmas: that God has come. And in coming, He calls us to follow Him. *'Let me go there.'*

Amen.

Taken out: (In this way *'Faith is neither a perversion of human freedom nor a marginal and private eccentricity; it is human freedom raised to its fullest by the fact that God has embraced it in love.'*)