

And this blog entry from “Menno Frederickson” who lives and works in a city in Asia reminds us that the Baby was born for a purpose—a purpose we do well to remember in every season. -cs

I go to God’s Bloody Place where the Throats of the Animals are Slit for Sacrifice

I was studying Psalm 43 with a friend (in Urdu) the other day. We came to the verse where it says (in English), “I will go to the altar of God”.

As I read along in Urdu, I did not know the Urdu word for “altar” and asked my friend what it was. He did not know how to translate the word into English, and hence gave the following English description, “It is God’s Bloody Place, where the throats of the animals are slit for sacrifice”.

Of course, it’s an altar.

Sometimes I think of the “altar” as the carpeted stairs and dais at the front of the Church Meetinghouse. But it is not. It is a bloody place. It is where sacrifice and death take place.

I need to remember that. **BB**

WE ARE IMMANUEL!

by Conrad Showalter

It sounds almost heretical, the idea that we are somehow Immanuel, the presence of God in the world—God in human form. And yet the idea is so strong in scripture. We *are* the Body of Christ.

I suppose this question is a bit like the arguments about the emblems of the communion service. Some argue for the understanding that in the blessing of the bread and wine, they literally become the body and blood of Christ. Other believers are content with a symbolic understanding which sees the bread and wine representing the spiritual presence of Christ among us. Yet other believers were so disenchanted by the arguments that they have made communion a spiritual moment, completely discarding the physical bread and wine as part of the memorial service.

Yet how we view the church in relation to Christ’s presence among us is critical to our self understanding as the people of God. Jesus clearly understood the significance of the coming transition when he was about to ascend into heaven. The reason it was good, no, best, for him to be leaving was that the Holy Spirit could then be given to the church. The Holy Spirit could fill believers and become the presence of God in the world.

We all agree, the man Jesus is with the Father, seated at his right hand. So we may well ask “Is God still with us? Is Immanuel here?” And we may well answer “Of course, the Holy Spirit, the Advocate is here, convincing the world of sin and righteousness and coming judgment.”

That answer, however, reminds us of the awesome nature of the First Coming—God became present in human form. Jesus was Immanuel, God with us! Since Jesus is now with the Father, we are left with the simple conclusion that we, the church, the Body of Christ are now the human presence of God in our world. We are Immanuel.

What an awesome opportunity and responsibility! We are commissioned to share with the nations the good news of God’s salvation through Jesus. We are commissioned to speak comfort and forgiveness to sinners in the name of Jesus. We are commissioned to demonstrate the kingdom of heaven here, on earth. We are commissioned to feed the poor, to clothe those shivering with cold, to visit those in prison, to love enemies, to fill up the sufferings of Christ. Yes, we are commissioned to be Immanuel!

So when you take a child in your arms and bless her, you are the presence of Jesus. Yes, that’s what he did. When you hear the confession of brokenness from a brother, and you speak words of comfort and forgiveness and say “Go, and sin no more,” you are being the presence of Jesus. That is what he did. And when you rebuke the self-centered and self-serving false piety of the religious, you also are being the presence of Jesus. That is what he did.

This Christmas season, as we celebrate the first coming of Jesus, and for whatever days or years until he returns again, let us remember that we are his presence here. Let us live like Jesus. Let us be Immanuel. **BB**