



**THE ANGLICAN ARCHBISHOP OF ADELAIDE
SERMON DELIVERED AT THE
CHRISTMAS MIDNIGHT SERVICE
ST PETER'S CATHEDRAL
FRIDAY 24 DECEMBER 2010**

WORDS, WORDS AND THE WORD

In places like Australia,
when we are struck by cupid's arrows,
when romance catches us in its thrall,
we might look all cow-eyed at our beloved
and pledge our love with all our heart
and if she does not respond in kind,
we lament that we are "broken hearted".

All that would seem strange to the ancient Hebrews,
for whom the seat of the emotions was a little lower down the human anatomy and who
might describe their affection for their beloved
in terms of something happening in their bowels!

These notions, too,
would probably seem a little odd to the people of the Marshall Islands,
who save for the influence of Hollywood,
would not think of mentioning the heart in the context of love,
for on the Marshall Islands, when you fall in love,
you tell your beloved that she causes you a pain in the neck!

As they say on TV, do not try these experiments at home!

Words, words and more words.
They have their limitations. They do not always convey what we intend.

But we live in a world, in which we are besieged by words,
but in which communication is getting less personal by the day.

Ours is an increasingly dehumanised world;
where people are processed in bulk,

fed “spin”, treated as statistics
and have Facebook “friends” they have never met.

It’s a digital age, in which we are texted, twittered and tweeted,
blogged and bombarded with information.

Words, words and more words.

The sad caricature of the digital age,
is of two people in the same room
texting each other, rather than addressing
that other human presence there with them.

Australians are connected, on line, wired and informed,
yet statistics tell us our personal relationships are breaking down
at a disturbing rate.

Words, words and more words.
But communication, if anything, is getting less personal.

The message of Christmas is that Christ is God's Word;
but a very personal word; a Word made flesh.

At the time the Gospels were being written,
the Greeks had the notion of a Word,
 or Logos as they called it;
a rational principle,
 underlying all things,
 giving order and meaning to life.

But for the Gospel writers,
the Christmas story meant so much more than such abstractions
 so much more than philosophical principles,
 so much more than words and more words.

For them, this Word of God was not just something abstract.
It was not just something which you might read about in a book;
It was not just some more words to be pondered or debated.

It was a personal presence.
It was a word in human flesh.
A birth. A baby; a human presence.

“The Word became flesh and lived among us”, they wrote.

There is something profoundly disarming about a baby.

A baby brings no gifts into the world other than itself.

It comes with no assets and has no power.

It has no deals to proffer, no bargains to offer.

It has nothing to give but its own presence.

On those occasions when proud parents present us with their incredibly small, vulnerable, infant, we are inevitably drawn, touched and warmed.

We reach out a finger, perhaps, to have it grasped by the tiniest hand and somehow there is an almost holy moment of connection.

A baby.

That most vulnerable human presence.

God comes to us in even in the most fragile,
the powerless , the most at risk.

God is found where the powerful do not expect,
where the strong and privileged may not look,
in vulnerability and nakedness
in dependency and gift,
a birth, a baby.
For Christians,
the Christ Child and the manger scene,
tell the story of God's love being present in human life..

God speaks to us of His love.
Not in words alone,
not in words that are empty, or can be misunderstood,
or misconstrued or twisted,
but in the face of another like ourselves,
by coming, being present as a vulnerable child.

The child of Christmas.
A family with next to nothing;
finding refuge in a manger;
an appalling scene; a beautiful scene.

In the midst of all the pressures on family and relationships, the child of Christmas reminds us that what love often requires is simply that we find ways to be present to each other.

At Christmas and all times, those we love do not require our presents; they need us to be present to them.

They do not need our gifts; they need the gift of our selves.

In a world flooded with information,
a digital deluge,
the child of Christmas confronts us
with the need simply to take time
and to be truly present to those we love,
and those who need our love.

In a world seduced by stuff, ,
seeking meaning by getting and spending,

manically addicted to consumption,
especially in this Christmas season,
the child of Christmas confronts us
with love in its simplicity.

We are not being enriched socially, emotionally and spiritually
by our addiction to stuff. And the planet cannot afford our addiction.

Human life is made rich, not by the stuff we have
or even by the stuff we give; not by the digital deluge
that floods our every waking moment,
but by being present to those we love,
and those who need our love;
by relationship, family, simplicity
and self-giving.

It's the gift of Christmas
It is the gift of God.