

Hebrews 1:1-4 Christmas Day Pastor Fraser Pearce

Have you ever had cleaner hands than in 2020?
Especially in the last year we know the importance of being clean
As we come into community
Not just so we don't get sick
But so that others don't get sick because of us

It would be one thing to catch Covid, and to deal with the suffering
- No doubt you've read or heard accounts of what it can be like -
But imagine that you went out in public
Perhaps with a hunch that you were sick
And then gave the disease to others who suffered terribly, and even died
You would bear the *guilt* of their deaths
And the *shame* of giving them the disease
And of shutting down society for everyone else
Would you want to be the pizza guy?
You would know that your *uncleanness*, your infectiousness
Was more serious than you were willing to acknowledge

Now this very human reality
Also reveals something to us about our life with God
It's not just that we can be guilty before God
And ashamed of who we are and what we have done
Like our first parents in the garden
It's also that we are, naturally, *unclean* before God
We can't just come into God's presence as we are
If we are to live with God
We need our guilt forgiven
We need our shame covered
And we need our impurity cleansed
We need God to clean us inside out
Or we can never come into his holy presence

Today, this Christmas day, I'm proclaiming Good news from God's word:
God has revealed himself to us not primarily in our guilt, shame or uncleanness
These things don't tell us who God is
He has revealed himself in his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ

And Jesus has revealed what God is like not only in his words
But in his actions, especially in the high priestly action of his death
His resurrection, and his ascension
That took away our guilt, covered our shame, and *cleansed us from our sin*
So let's listen to God word
And let his word fill us with trust, so that we can approach God with true heart
And live in his presence with the joy and peace
That are the true and lasting Christmas gifts

This how the reading begins

It's also the beginning of the book of Hebrews:

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.

For Christian people, like for God's faithful people of old

God is the God who speaks: Not only through the wonders of creation

Or in the inner depths of our being

But also and especially in his word.

God's prophets, such as we heard today from Isaiah

Spoke his true and authoritative word to our fathers and mothers in faith

And to this day we listen and meditate on these words

But in God's timing he spoke not simply through his messengers

But through his Son

There are two aspects of Jesus' sonship that the author focuses on

One is that Jesus, the Son, is the heir of all things

That is, that everything that is, visible and invisible

Is the ultimate possession of Jesus

This is good for us to hear we so many other voices claim ultimate authority

No one can make a claim on us that Jesus does not counter claim

With true and greater authority

When people bully us or belittle us or exclude us or harm us

It can feel like they have true power over us

And insofar as we believe what they say, they do have power

But Christ Jesus has the last word: he is the heir of all things

We need to hear this especially when we meditate on those messages

That drag us down, that make us feel like giving up

It is not the Holy Spirit that makes us want to give up

But an unholy, unclean Spirit

Jesus, who is heir of all things, gives us his Holy Spirit filled word
He, who is gentle and humble in heart encourages us to come to him:
Listen to him

But more than this – and this is a marker of his divinity –

All things were made *through him*

Or, as we put it in the creed: ***through Him all things were made***

Only God can truly create, and it is through Jesus that all things came into being.

This is also what we heard in the Gospel reading today

You can find true rest in knowing, in trusting,

That God has created you, and that he sustains you

And that this God is not an idea or a power, but a person

Jesus Christ, born of Mary

Who knows what it is to be human

And who can sympathise with you as a true priest

Who can bring your needs to the Father

The text then goes on with two more images for who Jesus is

Listen to God's word: **[Jesus] is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.**

He is the reflection – other translations have brightness or radiance

Or even effulgence of God's glory

To get this image, think of the sun and the rays that it sends out

What the sun is and the light that it sends out

Are part of the same reality

That is one image for the relationship of Jesus to his Father.

In the Nicene creed we confess this truth in this way:

Jesus is ***God from God, light from light, true God from true God***

The other image is that Jesus is the exact imprint of God's very being

One way to picture this is that of the impression that a seal makes in wax

The picture is the same: all analogies can break down

And in the creed we confess our belief with the words

That Jesus is of ***one substance with the Father***

It is because Jesus is divine that the writer of Hebrews states that Jesus **sustains all things by his powerful word.**

Jesus upholds creation even now

The one through who all things were made, the one who is heir to all

Is the one who sustains us in life, in death, in the resurrection

Some people can say that they don't believe in God
Or don't like God, but that Jesus is alright, or even good
As Christians we confess that *to see Jesus is to see God*
And therefore to know that God is good: not only in word but actions

And this brings us to the last part of the text: **When [Jesus] had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.**

When he has made purification for sins

When he had cleansed us from all that would make us unfit to come
Into the presence of God; when he had done his high priestly duty
Then he sat down at God's right hand

Then he took the place of honour and authority

This is what we confess in the Nicene Creed

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We could not bring lasting salvation to others by our suffering and death

We could not rise, by our own strength, into the resurrected life

We could not ascend to the heavenly realm

And although we may be tempted to judge others

We are in fact caught up in our own ignorance and delusion and sin

Only Jesus is the one who could bring us salvation

By his incarnation, by his suffering and death for our sake

By his resurrection, his ascension, his coming into our lives to rule

And so our trust is not in ourselves, but in Jesus

In who he is, and in what he has done for us

Dear people of God

Since our Lord has forgiven our guilt, since he has covered our shame

Since he has cleansed us and made us fit to be with God

Let us approach his table today in joy and trust

And rejoice in the gracious presence of God with us

And grow in love for each other

So that the Father's name may be glorified in our world.

In Jesus' name. Amen!