

# Second Sunday after Christmas Day

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## Introduction

How does Jesus's incarnation guide us in the art of conflict transformation, when working with very human, bodily-grounded feelings of rage, grief, terror and despair? And what does the distinction between 'the Law' given through Moses, and the 'grace and truth' which came through Jesus have to teach us about the art and craft of conflict transformation?

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## Text

John 1:10-18

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

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## Comment

Two themes occur to me as I read this passage through the lens of conflict transformation.

Firstly, I am drawn to the contrast between Jesus being 'in the world' and 'yet the world did not know him.' We could explore the nature of Jesus' divinity – both fully human and fully divine: the incarnation. As we turn through Christmas towards the Epiphany, we could reflect on the rootedness of the divine Christ in the real life of

the world he fully inhabited – living, breathing, eating, sleeping: like us.

Reading this through the lens of conflict transformation, I notice myself reflecting on the very bodily experiences that can influence how we respond in situations of tension or conflict. One of my mentors in the world of faith-based mediation is a great proponent of body work in conflict situations. She would always ask, in supervision, about the ways that my body was responding in conflict. Was I feeling tense or anxious; were my hands becoming clammy, was my heart beating faster? Noticing how our bodies respond can provide extremely useful data in 'the heat' of the moment, and can be useful to remember 'in the cool of the moment' also.

As Christians we are invited to take as our example the incarnate Christ – the one who was fully, bodily, flesh-ily human. So it's natural, then, as a faith-based mediator, to allow myself to take note of what my body is telling me, of the wisdom my body is imparting both in times of great joy, and in times of sorrow, grief or conflict.

Secondly, in this passage the evangelist contrasts the Law, '*given* through Moses', with grace and truth, which '*came* through Jesus.' There's an interesting use of words here which may shed light on this passage as we look at it through the lens of conflict transformation. Law is '*given*' (*edothen*), while grace and truth '*came into being*' (*egeneto*).

As a trainee minister, working for a while within the head offices of my denomination, I came into contact with many wise people, one of whom went to great lengths to articulate the difference between the 'rule of law', and the 'spirit of the law.' While decisions in church courts (in my denominational context we have layers of courts which govern church law) were bound by *the rule of law*, there was always a thread close to the surface which demanded that we also ask: what does *the spirit of the law* require of us?

I found that distinction useful not as a 'get out' clause if the law is too tricky or obscure, but that within each conversation, each decision, the role of the 'spirit' – the tone, the mood, the culture – was given space and life to influence the outcome. It is into this space that threads of compassion, of love, of particularity enter. Is this where grace and truth lie?

In the world of conflict transformation, being able to move with ease in the space between the 'letter' and the 'spirit' of the law is a skill for mediators and conflict transformation facilitators. Questions such as 'what is truth?', 'where is justice?' and 'what is fair?' may arise in this space.

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## Response

- In what ways is the wisdom in your body speaking to you today?
- As we move towards the Epiphany, what 'wisdom' do you long for?
- What does a distinction between the 'rule' and the 'spirit' of the law say to you in your context?

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## Prayer

### A prayer of thanksgiving

Lord of Hope  
we give you thanks for a new day.  
We arise today to a horizon guiding our eye beyond the everyday;  
to a dawn gently lighting up the wonders of your creation;  
to a whispered dew rooting us firmly in this precious earth.  
For this and more we thank you.

Lord of Hope  
we give you thanks for a new year.  
We arise today  
to the knowledge that your Son, our Lord, goes before us;  
to the hope that through his presence all people will be transformed;  
to the promise of salvation for all.  
For this and more we thank you.

Lord of Hope  
we give you thanks for a new start.  
We arise today turning our backs on the ways of judgement and criticism;  
sloughing off narrow-minded assumptions;  
reaching out to enemy and friend with generous compassionate hearts.  
For the promise of a new start, a new year, a new day,  
for these gifts and for so much more we thank you.  
Amen.

### A blessing:

Now go in peace;  
may this day, this year unfold as it should;  
may you find solace in scripture and spirit;  
and may your journey into this new year  
be filled with the hope and promise of God  
for the sake and the peace of the world.  
Amen.

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## Further Reading

Ruth Burgess (ed.), *Hay and Stardust: resources for Christmas to Candlemas* (Wild Goose Publications, 2005).

Kate McIlhagga, *The Green Heart of the Snowdrop* (Wild Goose Publications, 2004).