

## **“The Word Became Flesh”**

(John 1:10-18)

As Midwesterners there are certain responsibilities that we take very seriously so as to contribute to the betterment of society. For example, from a young age we are taught to have a discerning palate for the delicacy known as a cheese curd, a marvel of nature. We learn the fine art of mercilessly making fun of those living in the states that bump up against ours. And we teach children an awareness of and an appreciation for the weather. To be honest, we can be a bit obsessive about the weather. Everyday, Ethan comes home from school having written out his name, the date, and the weather. Everyday, Olivia and her class sit in a circle and affix colorful Velcro pictures of sun or clouds or rain or snow to their calendar to match what is going on outside the window. I stand in line at Woodman’s and pass the time studying the five day forecast. I am so acculturated and attuned to the weather that I have a nervous twitch and anxiety if I don’t catch the early morning forecast at the gym. We are aware of what is going on outside for a variety of reasons. Partly so we can conversant with others as a dependable and safe topic to bring up at any and all gatherings, but also because we live in a place where dramatic weather shifts happen in short spans. We live in a place where snow storms and tornados punctuate the year. We live in a place where the four seasons make us more keenly aware of our bodies.

We know the feeling of frozen fingers and toes when the temperatures plummet, as they have the last few days and no amount of layering turtlenecks and sweaters and coats can convince our bodies that it makes any sense to live in a place where it is so cold. We know the feeling of warmth that comes from the summer sun soaking our skin as we seek out any spot in the shade to escape the unrelenting heat that can literally be seen dancing in waves off the asphalt on a humid August day. We know the feeling of refreshing spring breezes that fill us with indescribable new life after being cooped up breathing the same air that makes us a little lightheaded after a long winter. And we know the awe-inspiring, no words needed, kind of beauty of an autumn day in Wisconsin where apple scents are carried on breezes and make us crave pies and cider and of course football.

All that is to say, that I believe living in a place that celebrates and, even if reluctantly at times embraces the four seasons, enables us to have an important insight into the truth of the incarnation. Today, we celebrate, as the Gospel of John says, ‘that the Word became flesh’. For a brief moment in history the uncontrollable, uncontainable sacredness of God took the form of a human body. God became flesh; tangible, visible, and real. God became human with all the vulnerability and amazing wonders that occupying this vessel that brought us here this morning can bring. The mystery of the incarnation that John describes in his poetic, hymn-like introduction has always been a bit difficult to wrap our minds around. The claim that God would even consider coming to us in the flesh, not just the appearance like a human body, not just some elaborate magic trick that looked like a normal body, but entered into this world in a body that got hungry and angry and could hug children and laugh and cry and even feel pain. The incarnation, God with us in real ways is what truly is at the heart of the Christmas celebration.

And so, nine days into the Christmas journey, still lingering at the familiar manger scene what sets our minds reeling and souls spinning, friends, comes not in the form of presents we unwrap, but in a presence we can feel. The sacred comes to us as a human being, embodied and in the flesh. As you move deeper into the Christmas mystery we discover that the God we worship is not distant and inaccessible; but present and real and woven into this world in ways that we can sense and share. God’s wisdom and word comes to us in a distinguishable form

that we instantly recognize. The incarnation simply means Jesus is fully human, experiencing and exploring and encountering all that this one single word evokes and means.

To be sure, the gospels go on to tell us countless different ways that Jesus lived that humanity and being incarnate. And while it is not the frozen tundra he walks on or Packer's shirts he wears, there is still plenty of sacred similarities we share with him. He makes friends. He breaks bread. He feels the warmth of the sun drench his face. He cries out with anguish. He is tempted. He listens and he offers his full presence. All experiences we can relate to and resonate with moments in our lives. For Jesus incarnation happens within community. One of my favorite parts of John's prologue is that last paragraph and the emphasis that echoes through those words is the call to live the incarnation communally. 'The Word became flesh and lived among **us** and **we** have seen his glory...from his fullness **we** have **all** received grace upon grace.'

The invitation in those words is to live the incarnation. I think we can live the incarnation in several ways. We can notice our bodies. When we eat and when we walk outside and when we feel the embrace of another and when we hear the person singing next to us or see a friend across the room that causes a smile to cross our face; in all these ways, and countless others, we tap into and can be aware of the sacred. You might want to take a few moments this week and write down ways you feel like you can connect with God through your body. Find and embrace ways of experiencing God with all your senses and then some. So, practice the incarnation this week by paying attention to what you taste, touch, see, smell, and the sounds around you. For example, this morning as I was practicing my sermon, getting ready at the house, I hear Olivia downstairs belting out "Go Tell it on the Mountain" in such a way I stopped what I was doing just to listen. Practice the incarnation this chilly, blustery week by paying attention to creation and try to connect with God's handiwork. Notice the wind shifting snow in waves across the sidewalk; look at the patterns left in the wake. If you are feeling particularly brave, bundle up and take a brief stroll, feel the chill on the tip of your nose and your cheeks get rosy, feel the ways the cold makes us walk differently. Practice the incarnation not only as a solo act, but in awareness and appreciation for the others. Be aware of those who brush up against your life, whether that person is a stranger you pass on the steps at Hedberg Library or a friend you have coffee with or even a co-worker you feel estranged from or frustrated with.

Practicing the incarnation means we carry an alertness that each moment is saturated with the possibilities of God breaking into our world, just as God did in a manger so long ago. The incarnation, God in our midst, God in our world, God in our lives in real ways did not just take place in Bethlehem, but rather is still taking place. And that truth still causes us, like the magi of old, to offer our gifts. We still come in response to the good news of God's presence in this place with our own presence and offering our own lives for God's grace and guiding. So, friends, let us practice the incarnation this week. Let us open our eyes to notice God, let us open our ears and hear God, let us open our hearts to embrace God for indeed just as the magi were surprised that Jesus was not to be found in the royal palace or in any usual sacred place, but rather in an ordinary home. Just as the magi got a bit lost and needed the help of a star to guide their way, so too we need to be open and willing to embrace God's in-breaking this day and this week in place we would never expected. So may you be surprised by God's incarnation, may you practice and have an awareness for the sacred stirring inside you and beside you and in the faces of those who you brush up against, and may each of us share those sacred moments with each other as the new year unfolds in our midst throughout the coming fifty-one weeks. May it be so for you and me. Thanks be to God and let the people of God say, "Amen!"