

Christmas 1C 2015 Sermon

And the Word became flesh and lived among us.... -- John 1:14

In his song, “What If God Was One Of Us?”, Eric Bazilian asks, “If God had a face, what would it look like?” The meaning of the Incarnation, the Word becoming flesh, leads us to answer, “God *has* a face, and it looks like your face, and my face, and the faces of humans everywhere.” What that means is if people want to know what God is like, it is you and I who must show them. People who will come to know the Living God will not arrive at that moment by persuasive arguments or logical thinking or scientific proof. More than likely, they will come to know what God is like through knowing God’s people. People who experience love do not do so by reading about it in a book. They experience love through the actual love other human beings. People can read about God in scripture and elsewhere, but not much of it will hold water unless they see the face of God in you and me.

One Christian denomination [Disciples of Christ] has adopted a mission statement that summons the church “to be and to share the good news of Jesus Christ.” [repeat] The “being” comes first. We cannot *share* the good news unless we **are** the good news. And that’s what we were meant to be from the beginning: we were created in the image and likeness of a loving God that we might *be love* in the world.

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us...”

It’s always nice to hear people say, “Oh, I drove through your town last week and saw your church. It’s beautiful.” Well, yes and no. Yes, this building *is* beautiful – no question about it! But this building is *not* the church. **Nowhere** in the New Testament does the word “church” refer to a building; it *always* refers to a group of Christians gathered together as a Christian community. People are not going to come to have faith in Jesus Christ because our building is beautiful. They are going to come to trust in Jesus Christ when they see all the occasions when the church *becomes* the good news, when the Word becomes flesh. And the Word becomes flesh all over the place.

People volunteer time and money to prepare and deliver meals to those confined to their homes, or provide transportation for those unable to drive, and the Word becomes flesh. Church members visit those who are in prison, and the Word becomes flesh. Church members pour forth their time each week serving on the altar guild, teaching Sunday School, serving as acolytes, bringing communion to shut-ins, and the Word becomes flesh. Church members volunteer at Loaves and Fishes, CASA, El Hogar, Mercy Today, the Episcopal Thrift House, or the Methodist Luncheon in order to help those **outside** of themselves, and the Word becomes flesh. Members give a supportive phone call to those who are shut-in or

sick, send cards, warmly welcome newcomers, help out a neighbor, pray daily for others, give sacrificially of their income for God's work in the church and in the world, and the Word becomes flesh. Church members spend countless hours making baby blankets or prayer blankets or wooden crosses for people they don't even know, and the Word becomes flesh. Church members are faithful to a daily spiritual practice which empties them of ego and fills them with God's Spirit, and the Word becomes flesh. Faithful Christians seek to understand those whose beliefs, ethnicity, or sexual orientation is different from their own, and connect with them, and the Word becomes flesh. People are kind to each other, refrain from gossip, take an interest in the lives of others, truly seek and serve Christ in one another, and the Word becomes flesh. You realize that your life is not about you – and you live accordingly – and the Word becomes flesh.

Anyone who truly serves others selflessly knows that what we *give* of ourselves often **pales** in comparison to what we get back. It's not just that the Word becomes flesh in **our** actions, but that the Word is *already* flesh in those to whom we minister. "Whenever you did it to the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me," Jesus taught. (Mt. 25:40) Jesus is already in those "least" ones. We promised in our baptism to "seek and serve Christ in all persons" – which only makes sense if Christ is already there to be found in all persons! If we open the eyes of our soul, we can see the Word being made flesh in almost every person we meet – and mirror that image of God back to them. The courageous single mother or father holds down a fulltime job while raising three kids with love, and the Word becomes flesh. The calm faith of a family waiting for the surgeon to come out of the operating room makes a powerful witness, and the Word becomes flesh. The people who are rebuilding after a hurricane embody a hope that transcends their tragedy, and the Word becomes flesh. A church member sits in a hospital room in support of a family who is watching a loved one die, and the word becomes flesh. A foster family learns and receives as much from the foster child as the child learns and receives from them, and the Word becomes flesh.

The decline that so many churches have been experiencing over the past 15 years or so is in a way baffling, since we live in a time when there is a desperate need for kindness, love, and community – which are gifts the Church has to offer! In this day and age, people are less and less concerned about denominations and worship services, and more and more concerned with finding a supportive, receptive, loving community that will welcome and care about them and reach beyond themselves into the world. There is a lot of debate in churches about various issues, but people who are hurting aren't looking to debate issues. They are looking for the Word that gives life and comfort and hope, and they are looking right at us to see if that Word has any flesh on it.

The Word becoming flesh is a powerful statement about God's presence in Jesus, but it is also more. The Word becoming flesh leads us toward one another, pointing us toward a new community where we see worth and dignity in all of

God's children. The Word becoming flesh reminds us that the truth and light live *in us*. Yet we know none of us is capable of holding *all* the truth and light, so we need and depend on each other for pieces of the truth and light that we do not yet have.

Jerry had lived down the street from the church for nine years, but no one in the church or the neighborhood knew him very well. He didn't participate in the church or community. One afternoon his wife suffered a major stroke, and all there was to do was wait. Jerry and his three children waited 39 days in the hospital – but they didn't wait alone. Every single day of that 39-day stretch somebody from the church stopped by to say hello. Two church members drove grandchildren back and forth to school, ball games, and dances. Another church member mowed Jerry's yard and watered his flowers. Another person from the church who worked for the same company as Jerry transferred sick days from her account to Jerry's account so that Jerry would continue to receive a salary. During that time the people from the church got to know Jerry and came to appreciate him very much. On the day Jerry's wife died, people from the church were there.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory... full of grace and truth.

AMEN

(Note: A good deal of this sermon comes from a sermon by William B. Kincaid, III)

1. William Barclay, *The Gospel of John, Volume 1* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 65.