

In Flesh  
John 1:1-5, 10-14, 16-18  
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
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Do you remember how the Bible begins? In the opening chapters of Genesis we get two creation stories. Now the reality is that, in the church, we don't tend to think of them as two separate stories, but there are details from each that we can usually recall.

Most people who know the creation stories within the Judeo-Christian tradition are aware of a rhythm of God speaking things into existence...God said let there be light and – you guessed it – there was light. And we are generally also familiar with the idea of a second human being created from the rib of the first.

But it is that idea of speaking things into existence that I want to spend a moment with before we get to today's text. In that first creation story, scripture begins with the power of the word. And we could spend time talking about this in many ways – after all, if we are honest, we don't have to talk about God speaking things into existence to know that words have power. That old adage, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt" has never been true – it is simply a statement of either denial or hope.

Words are powerful things. In fact, there are many practices of posting positive words or repeating meaningful phrases that are designed to help our physical, mental and emotional health. Simply put – words matter. I suspect it is no accident that scripture begins with the word.

So, let us not miss the fact that when John, the gospel writer, opens his gospel he, too, does so with the Word. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the

Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.”<sup>1</sup>

And too often in Christian tradition the conversation has stalled there. It has become about the trinity, an idea with foundations in the New Testament, but that was really a doctrine developed in the first several centuries of the early church, or it has become about proving Jesus’ divinity beyond a shadow of a doubt. All too often these opening verses of John have been used to make a case for the claim that Jesus was part of the “us” to which the divine refers in the creation story.

And too often this focus has caused us to miss what comes a few verses later when John writes, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us,”<sup>2</sup> or as Eugene Peterson writes in his translation *The Message*, “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.”<sup>3</sup>

Friends, while at some level we might like this image, the reality is that this is something we aren’t all ready to deal with. Maybe that’s why the most frequent Christian conversations around John 1 have been around either the trinity or Jesus’ divinity. Because the idea of God being real, here in the midst of our wonderful and messy lives, may just be a little too much for us.

Scripture begins with God speaking things into existence. The Word creates. We are in many ways more comfortable with that. While we like the idea of a Jesus who welcomes little children and pats us on the back and tell us we are okay, there are many ways in which we are

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:1-3a, *NRSV*.

<sup>2</sup> John 1:14a, *NRSV*.

<sup>3</sup> John 1:14a, *The Message*.

much more comfortable with an all-powerful God who sits at a distance, a God upon whom we can comfortably blame things and to whom we can cry out in need.

But, what does it mean for the Word to be made flesh? What does it mean for someone to show us God in the intimate spaces of our lives? What does it mean for the presence of the divine to show up in flesh and blood and move into the house next door?

See, what John tells us is that the location of the Word has changed. The Word is no longer just something that is spoken into the ether – and remember, that is powerful, too – but the Word is now a lived reality that exists in flesh. In case we forgot to listen to what was floating around in the clouds around us, now the Word...the divine...the presence of God...is presenting in a new way with flesh and bones, with feelings and faults, with a lived experience in the midst of the same time and place in which others are living.

And if we are willing to sit with that concept...friends, it is a powerful one.

Because, when the Word becomes flesh...when the divine enters the daily lives of human beings, not only does it mean that God cares about us, but it means that the human experience matters.

We make a mistake if we locate our faith in heaven. If our faith is only about saying the right words, being baptized in the right time or fashion, believing the right things in order to ensure our home in heaven, then we miss out on a central message of the life of Jesus – that this world matters, that the human experience matters, that people matter, that creation matters.

Regardless of whether you understand Jesus as God – made of different stuff, part of God in a way that no other human has ever or will ever be; or whether you understand Jesus as human just like us but as the human who lived as the most open channel to God, the one who – in a way that is available to us if we are willing – shone God's light and love and made God available to

people; or even if you understand Jesus as simply an amazing person, perhaps a prophet, who did and said things that make him a worthy companion – regardless of where you come down on Jesus’ identity, on his humanity and divinity...it matters that we, as Christians, follow one who lived among us, one who had the full human experience.

And if we really embrace this, it will change who we are.

Because, look at the life of Jesus. He did not go around proclaiming his divinity and asking people to bow down to him. Rather, he pointed people toward a loving God whose embrace was big enough to include them no matter what.

Jesus didn’t sit on a shiny throne only interacting with those who were clean and worthy and declared deserving. Rather he lived and moved and had his being in the midst of the messy, dirty, broken chapters of real people’s lives.

Jesus looked in the eye those who were considered the other. Jesus touched those who were called untouchable. Jesus forgave those who were cut off because of the perception or reality of sin.

And most simply Jesus did this in the midst of the real routines of eating and sleeping, of the joys and struggles of being in relationship with other humans, of the difficulty of choosing that which was right when it meant great risk.

This is the person whose birth we celebrated on Christmas. This is the baby to whose improvised crib the tired, dirty shepherds came. This is the toddler, likely in the midst of his terrible twos, to whom magi from afar brought gifts and of whom the king the fearful. This Jesus, upon whom two thousand years of Christianity has been focused, has shone us God more clearly, yes...but let us never forget that he did it in the midst of the rhythms of daily life.

So, if we are his followers...how will we live in the flesh? How will we reflect God in our choices? How will God be seen, not only in our words and our claims, but in how we interact with others, how we use the resources to which we have access, how we leave or don't leave a bigger mess in this world.

This is the responsibility we have as Christians...to live our lives in ways that make the love of God more visible...to live our lives in ways that better the community...to live our lives in ways that care for God's creation...to live our lives in ways that remind people that all of our choices in this human life matter – not only for us, but for all people.

Today is the last Sunday in the season of Christmas. Tomorrow is Epiphany – the day when not only is the coming of the magi remembered, but when God being made manifest, being made clear, being made available to all the world is celebrated.

What better time than now is there for us to ask hard questions and to make new commitments to living in ways that make clear God's love for all the world? What better time than now for us to embrace our living – in the flesh, in this community, in this beautiful and broken world – and to choose each day to live in ways that reflect God's light and love?

May it be so.