

**Flesh Become Word**  
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**Gospel of John 1: 1-5, 14**

*1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

*14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

“In the beginning was Christ, who would walk the earth as Jesus of Nazareth, the Word made flesh, born to an unlikely young woman in an unimpressive way. In the beginning was the Word of God made flesh who kept really impolite company. In the beginning the Word was born and kept interesting company and said super-confusing things that to this day we are still trying to figure out: ‘The first shall be last, the last shall be first.’ ‘Those who seek to find their life must lose it.’ ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit.’ ‘Love your enemy.’ ‘Pray for those who persecute you.’ And, of all things: ‘Your sins are forgiven.’

In the beginning was the Word made flesh, the Living Water, who kept interesting company and taught some counter intuitive stuff and preached forgiveness of sins and also healed the sick and raised the dead and fed the hungry. And that was more than we could bear, so we betrayed and denied and accused and flogged and crucified him. And the Word of God made flesh still spoke only forgiveness. The Word became flesh and made its home in the body of a human woman. The Word became flesh and washed human feet, and smelled luxurious perfume, and tasted abundant wine. When Jesus wanted to heal the blind man, he didn't use good vibes or send positive energy: he used spit and dirt. Very real tears of salt ran down Jesus' face as he smelled the stink of death on Lazarus, the one he called friend.

Death could not contain the holy and defiant and pure love of God, and on the third day Christ defeated death and rose from the grave and then spent a little time really freaking out his friends and devouring a lot of snacks before ascending back to the Father. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we were given grace upon grace to become children of God. And in doing so, you, dear people of God, you are now flesh become Word.”

That was probably the longest introduction to a sermon ever, but I had to share that whole reading. It comes from Nadia Bolz-Weber's new book *Shameless*. Did you hear the end of her reading? You, dear people of God, you are now flesh become Word. Is that even possible? What does that even mean? Let's explore this together on this first Sunday in Lent.

This morning, as we hear the words of what's called John's prologue, the first eighteen verses of the Gospel, we hear some of the most inspiring and I believe challenging words of the entire New Testament. We've heard those first words before. “In the beginning...” Where have you heard that? “In the beginning God created,” as we know from Genesis. There's a clear

connection here between John's beginning and the Bible's beginning. In the beginning God created everything, the heavens, the earth, the light, the night, the water, the sky, the land, the day, living creatures, and human kind. And God said creation was good.

In the prologue of John's Gospel, we are introduced to Jesus the Christ, the human who embodies God's Word. The Greek for word is *logos*, where we get our words logic and logical. Jesus the Christ, then, is the knowledge, wisdom, reason, and revelation of God. Jesus is the Christ, the Word made flesh. And if we go back to Genesis for a moment, did you pick up how God created according to Genesis? God spoke. It is in God's words and God's Word, the Christ, we find the heart, will, and creative mind of God. As Adam Hamilton puts well in his book we are studying this Lent, "The Word is God's heart, God's reasoning, God's mind, God's purposes, God's character, God's creative power, and God's desire to reveal God's self to us" in Jesus the Christ.

This sounds like a lot of theology, but what does this look like actually lived out? Well, if we claim belief in this God made flesh, this God who became a human, this divine being who would risk becoming us; then, we are wired to see this divine nature, this Christ, in everyone. Caryll (Carol) Houselander, the British artist, mystic, author, and poet, describes her incarnational experience in this way:

*"I was in an underground train, crowded train in which all sorts of people jostled together, sitting and strap-hanging- workers of every description going home at the end of the day. Quite suddenly I saw with my mind, but as vividly as a wonderful picture, Christ in them all. But I saw more than that; not only was Christ in everyone one of them, living in them, dying in them, rejoicing in them, sorrowing in them- but because Christ was in them, and because they were here, the whole world was here too, here in this underground train. I came out into the street and walked for a long time in the crowds. It was the same here, on every side, in every passer-by, everywhere- Christ. Christ is everywhere; in Him every kind of life has a meaning and has an influence on every other kind of life."*

I don't know about you, but I heard John's words in her experience. "Through Christ all things were made. In Christ was life, and that life was the light of all humankind." She experienced the light of Christ in and through everyone. This brings to mind the words of Eugene Peterson's *The Message* version of this John passage. "The Life-Light was the real thing. Every person entering Life, he brings into Light. The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son. Generous inside out, true from start to finish."

Have you noticed the glory with your own eyes? It's hard to see clearly. We have so many distractions around us day by day and moment to moment. It's hard to keep ourselves focused on the true Life-Light. The distractions of the world tempt us to see people as worth less than they really are or even our own voice or outside voices telling us we're no good, we can't do it, or we're just plain bad, and the way we view the world, others, and ourselves too often keep us from being shocked by the Christ Light, when instead we're blinded by the darkness around us. The season of Lent is a time to reclaim John's vision of Life and Light in Christ. We are to be

intentional during this season about coming closer to God in Christ through examining our lives, our priorities, confessing our shortcomings and turning toward God through spiritual disciplines. You may have given something up for the season, it's a common practice. I had a person in my church once who diligently, every year for Lent, would give up sweets, including those amazing Sunday morning donuts. Yes, other churches have amazing donuts too! I had to ask though, what's the point? Does giving up sweets bring you closer to God? It might be a good self-discipline, but the whole point of the season is to draw closer to the Light of Christ. We give up something to free up time, to clear our hearts and minds, to be intentional about experiencing God in a new way during this time of preparation before Easter.

Perhaps the first step is found in the prologue of John's Gospel. If what we find in the prologue is true and something we believe, that the Word, God's character, heart, and will, became flesh, what we call the incarnation, from the Latin *incarne*, which means "to en flesh", then this world is soaked in Christ. Reality is already soaked in the Presence. Maybe John's Gospel is simply calling us to see differently and to be in awe of the Christ. In fact, maybe the best discipline we can embrace this Lent is to find Christ in each other and in ourselves. Episcopal priest and author Barbara Brown Taylor wrote, "The same God who came to the world in the body of Jesus comes to me now in the bodies of my neighbors, because God knows that we need a body to make things real, and the real physical presence of my neighbors makes them much harder for me to romanticize, fantasize, demonize, or ignore any of the ideas I have of them in my head." Now, I'm sure we all have people in our lives who we probably wouldn't say we easily see Christ in; in fact we might even say they are bad, evil, or something else. What would it be like if our spiritual discipline for Lent was to look upon everyone we see and say silently in our minds and hearts, "I honor Christ in you"? How would that change your experience with others? That seems so hard to do, but that's why we begin the season with such a strong reminder of our own mortality, sin, and shortcomings, by smearing ashes on our foreheads. Ash Wednesday and Lent are reminders for all us that we are equally sinners, yes, but equally loved and redeemed by God in Christ. That's something to be in awe of, God's love and grace, and sometimes we need strong reminders to wake us up from our slumber.

In late January I was in Florida for the Gladdening Light Symposium featuring the Rev. Dr. Matthew Fox, the famous author of 39 books including *Original Blessing*. During his lecture, he shared the story of a friend who was battling cancer. He was given only months, maybe even weeks to live, so he wanted to move someplace amazing. His friend decided to move to Colorado because he had never seen the mountains up close. Matthew Fox travels around the world to speak, so he wasn't in touch with his friend for about 6 months and decided to call his wife to see how she was after his friend's death. He called and was startled to hear the sound of his friend's voice. Matthew said, "I didn't expect to be talking to you. What happened?" His friend paused and simply replied, "I was just so amazed and in awe of the world around me, I guess, I kind of just forgot to die." Matthew Fox ended by reminding us that we don't have to move to Colorado to be in awe of God. Pick up a leaf and look at the detail of God's work. Look into the stars and be amazed at God's cosmos. See the people around you in the train shining with God's Light and glory. Breathe in and out and experience God's breath filling your lungs. Look at your hands and your body and remember that Divinity runs through your DNA, sacredness resides in your bones, and holiness moves through your body, your breath, and your being. Then read again John's words, "In the beginning was the Word. Through Christ all things

were made. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son." The Christ is all around us, in flesh. Christ is in all. God was made flesh and all flesh was made holy. If you can't see that, then you probably can't fully experience the incarnation. Put another way, if you embrace the incarnation and John's prologue, you will see the world filled with God's glory. You will experience Christ everywhere! May you discover our creating God this Lent in the Christ who came in a physical existence, the Word who is Christ, who embodied earthly reality. May you discover the Christ in loving the bodies of everyone you meet and see this Lent. May you discover in your very own breathing, in your own body, dear people of God, you are now flesh become Word.

Let us pray: *Light of Christ, awaken us this hour to the glory of your presence in our midst. Shine among us in such a way that the darkness without and within may be pushed back, such that we might truly see what is really real. Help us to recognize our sin for what it is. Enable us to behold the world as you created it to be, as you created us to be. Empower us to move from darkness to light, from sin to new life. May your light within us shine through into every day. This we pray in the name of the Word made flesh, the light which is the light of all people, Jesus the Christ our Lord. Amen.*