

“God’s Word Made Flesh”
December 29, 2024
Scripture: Isaiah 52:7-10; John 1:1-14

Our celebration of Christmas doesn’t end on December 25th. Christmas is meant to be celebrated every moment of our lives. It’s meant to remind us of God’s presence in the world and how that presence is expressed through flesh and blood encounters, through our actions in the world. So, the specific details about Jesus’ birth, the shepherds and angels, the wise men and the star, have their value but don’t really give us the whole picture. This prologue to John’s gospel steps back from all those details and looks at Jesus’ entrance in the world from a broader perspective.

“In the beginning was the Word.” In Greek it’s called “*logos*.” *Logos* is more than just an element of speech and runs deeper than something spoken. We get our word “logic” from *logos*. And logic is really a way of thinking about and seeing the world. Part of what the writer of this gospel is trying to say is Jesus represents, or embodies, God’s logic, God’s way of thinking about and seeing the world. So, to help us understand who Jesus is it makes sense to look at what we know about God’s hopes and expectations for us and for the world.

We get some insight to that from the poetry of prophets like Isaiah. Writing at the lowest moment in Israel’s history, when they are held captive in Babylon, Isaiah offers a vision of hope and restoration. Even though things are devastated and it seems as if nothing can be done to restore Israel, the prophet tells them, “Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem.” God’s messenger, the prophet, announces peace, *shalom*. Not just an end to conflict, *shalom* is more than just keeping a lid on boiling turmoil, but a return to wholeness and healing.

In Israel’s case the promise of *shalom* was probably thought to be for them alone. Even though in other places in Isaiah’s work we hear about the nations benefiting from Israel’s presence, the primary recipients of God’s favor are the people of Israel. But in the gospels that favor takes on a more universal character. “What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.” If it is God’s desire, according to Isaiah, that Israel be restored to wholeness, now, according to John, it’s God’s desire that all people be restored. Every personal relationship, every political alliance, every category of person is included in God’s vision for the world.

That’s a message worth spreading over and over. It’s a message begun with the life and teaching, the death and resurrection of Jesus, but the Word made flesh continues to be revealed through those of us willing to allow God to inhabit us and work through us. We talk a lot about all that God does in the world, but when you read scripture closely you discover that everything God does is accomplished through God’s people who are willing to embody God’s desires. God needs us to be expressed in the world. The Word is made flesh through us.

I’m reminded all the time of the words of Bishop Desmond Tutu who once said, “Without God, we cannot; without us, God will not.” That is as much the message of Christmas as the

joyful news the angels sing. Jesus' birth is God's affirmation of us. In his great Oratorio poem on Christmas, "For the Time Being," W. H. Auden observes, "Remembering the stable where for once in our lives everything became a You and nothing was an It." The Word becomes flesh and we are seen and valued and loved, for who we are, as we are. We are no longer objects to be used but persons to be engaged and cherished. That's what Christmas reveals about God's logic.

Our challenge is to embody that logic, that *logos*, that Word, and make it our own. We are called to see the world through new eyes, to find joy in one another's presence even when we're a little afraid and apprehensive about one another. There are so many forces around us that thrive on fear and promote hate. There are so many who want to narrow our vision so that we shut out of our awareness people on the margins, people whose value lies in their utility and not their presence. But if the Word is made flesh in us, then we can see beyond the narrow boundaries of race or gender identity or ethnicity, beyond origins or economic status. If the Word is made flesh in us we can embrace the divine in ourselves and others and see God everywhere we look, even when we look in the mirror.

That's the discipline Christmas calls us to practice. It's not about just acknowledging on a day the birth of God; it's about carrying that birth forward in ourselves so that life and light can be revealed in concrete ways, bringing the message of peace and restoring people to wholeness. Let God's Word be made flesh in you and may light shine through the world's darkness so *that* darkness cannot overcome it.

Amen