

## **The Word Became Flesh**

John 1:10-18

Communion Meditation preached by Charles C. Williamson

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For hundreds of years, archaeologists working in Egypt turned up many artifacts which were inscribed with the mysterious picture writing known as hieroglyphics. The archaeologists understood that the pictures were the means of writing for the ancient Egyptians, but hard as they tried, they couldn't crack the meaning of the pictures. Then in 1799, a group of French soldiers found a black stone near the town of Rosetta in lower Egypt. The stone was inscribed in 196 BC, and praised an Egyptian king. But what was remarkable about this Rosetta Stone was that it was written in both hieroglyphics and Greek. So scholars who knew Greek could compare the Greek with the hieroglyphics, and this proved the key that unlocked the meaning of these ancient Egyptian writings. It was the Rosetta Stone that made it possible for people to understand words that previously had been incomprehensible.

You might say that for centuries, God's word to the people of God was as hard to grasp as those hieroglyphics. For years, people were simply unclear about what God was saying to them. Until...on a dark winter night, in an obscure little village in Israel, a baby was born. And in the birth of a baby, God's word took human form. In Jesus, God's word became flesh. God spoke a son. God came to us to make clear what we had so long misunderstood. Jesus is the key that unlocks the meaning of God's word to us.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...full of grace and truth.

It's the "full of grace and truth" part that I want to talk about today. It seems to me that people still often get confused about the message that Jesus brought from God. For example, there are many people hear about Jesus and they say, "The word became flesh and dwelt among us...full of fire and brimstone." These are people who seem to believe that the word of God that Jesus spoke to the world was a word of anger and fear. There used to be a bumper sticker I would see from time to time that said, "Jesus is coming again, and, boy, is he mad." You probably that series of billboards on the Charlotte streets and one of them read: "Don't make me come down there. God." As if God is some angry parent yelling down the stairs to disobedient children. That makes for a cute sign, but it's not the God Jesus told us about at all. There are people who seem to believe that we had better be good or God is going to come down here, and if God does come down here, it's going to be bad news.

Then there are other people who would say, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...full of sweetness and light." They seem to believe that God is this sweet little kind-hearted grandmother who is always saying, "Aw, it's all right, honey. Don't worry about it. It doesn't matter." They picture God as someone who just looks the other way when we sin and fail to do what God wills for us.

There are still others who say, "The word became flesh and dwelt among us...full of 'sound and fury signifying nothing.'" They have come to the conclusion that the word from God that took human form in Jesus is simply irrelevant and has no meaning for their lives. They think that they have made it to this point in their lives without God, so who really needs God?

But the fact is that the word God spoke in Jesus is none of those. It's not that Jesus came full of fire and brimstone or sweetness and light or sound and fury. In Jesus the word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth.

Let's start with "truth." The gospel of John Jesus says a lot about truth. It is in the gospel of John that Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6) It is in John that Jesus says, "You will know the truth and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32). In the gospel of John's account of his trial before Pilate, Jesus and Pilate have a discussion about the meaning of truth, and the conversation leaves Pilate asking the eternal question, "What is truth?"

So what is the truth about ourselves that we see in Jesus? Imagine that Jesus is holding up a mirror in which we can see the truth about who we are. What do we see in that mirror?

One thing we see is that we have been made in the image of God. Fundamental to our make-up is that God has instilled in us gifts and talents that can be used for good. We have the capacity to be partners with God in God's service. That's one of God's truths.

But that is not all we see when we look in that mirror. We also see that we often fail to use those gifts; that we are not always the people God intends for us to be. We are often selfish when we could be generous; we are anxious when we could be faithful; we are prejudiced when we could be open-minded; we are angry when we could be loving. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

The word of truth about us is that we are in need of God's saving grace.

Which brings us back to Jesus, the Word made flesh, full of grace and truth. The truth about our world and about ourselves is often not a very pretty sight. But Jesus came full of grace. He came to overturn the world's "truths" that value power and wealth. Rather, he came to lift up the powerless and the poor. Jesus came to us with a word of grace—to redeem us from our failings and sins.

The sacraments of the church are given to us as reminders of the grace of God, made known in Jesus. In baptism we celebrate God's love that is at work in our lives and the dedication of our lives to serve Christ. Around Christ's table, we are forced to see ourselves as we truly are and to admit that we are sinful, hard-hearted people. But also around Christ's table, we experience the wonderful grace that Christ brings—forgiveness, redemption and salvation.

In just a few moments we are going to remind ourselves of the grace that is ours through the sacraments. We are going to reaffirm our baptismal covenant by recommitting ourselves to Christ's service...then we will gather around Christ's Table and share the broken body and shed blood of a Savior who died to give us life, and give it abundantly. We observe these sacraments as gifts from God, who sent Jesus into the world to bring God's grace and truth. Thanks be to God.✠