

Full of Grace and Truth
A sermon by David Roquemore
First Presbyterian Church, Newton
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John 1: 14-18

This Word we have been talking about, this manifestation of God among us, is a real human being. He is Jesus Christ. Here in this passage we have it directly and clearly: The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. I know, our translation says, “lived among us.” I like dwelt. The one I do not like at all is “tabernacled among us.” What does that even mean? Who knows what a tabernacle is? We don’t use that word, except in Sunday school. And every kid says, “what’s a tabernacle?” and the answer is, “A tent.” So the Word “pitched his tent among our tents” or something like that. Could it be any more clear? He lived right next door. He lived a life like our lives.

So the divine comes down and in a huge and mysterious paradox becomes a human being! That surely should make our minds explode in the purple smoke, if you recall last week. How can God become a human being? And why would God choose to become a first-century Jewish man in Palestine? Why not come into our century? Live a life of luxury, with all the finest? God doesn’t do that. God does what God chooses to do, and we should look at that to see what we can learn.

So God the Son comes and enters our world in a very particular way. He lives a normal life, for that time and place, and has friends. He eats and drinks. He does most of the things that we do on an everyday basis. He is, to all outside observers, completely ordinary. And yet, he is the Son of God, he is God incarnate. We see Jesus as God incarnate, we see him as the Revealer, who brings the divine life to our lives, who shows us who God is by his very being, who lets us know what God wants with us by grace and truth. He shows us, by his gracious gift, what is the truth of God, what is revealed by and about God for us through him.

All through the Old Testament, we read where God intends to come and make his dwelling with human beings. He will live among us, his name will dwell with us. Now we see in this passage that God comes to dwell among us precisely in our flesh. Jesus is God come to live with us. Jesus is the living fulfillment of a lot of Old Testament texts and promises.

The early church fathers – and mothers; there were a few women involved! – had an oft-repeated phrase: he became what we are by nature so that we could become what he is by grace. The legal view of the cross that I mentioned last week is so inadequate! Jesus does far more than forgive our sins, or even imputing righteousness to us, where before we had none. No, Jesus calls us to become righteous, and to partake of the divine nature by grace, so that we can be raised to new life in him. Christianity is far more than praying a prayer and “getting saved,” so to speak.

When we look at Jesus, we see God’s glory! This may be confusing at first, for we don’t see any glory in the usual sense. Jesus doesn’t glow with the uncreated light of God. He doesn’t appear any different from anyone else. When Moses went up the mountain and encountered God directly, he came down and had to veil his face, lest the glow from it scare people. He picked up this glowing glory of God simply by being there. So we might expect the incarnate Son to have this tell-tale glow. But he doesn’t. So how do we know we see God’s glory?

We God's glory when we see people whom God has given the power to become the children of God! We see this glory when we hear the message of truth that Jesus proclaims, in the nitty-gritty everyday details of human life. When we hear the hard words, like "love your enemies," and "feed my sheep", we hear and see glimpses of his glory.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And where do we dwell? We live here, in Newton, Conover, Hickory, and beyond. We live in these ordinary streets, with the homeless people living in abandoned warehouses and walking the streets. We live in the dirt and squalor of an unfinished and unimpressive world. We live next to the sinfulness of our neighbors and ourselves. We live here! And this is where Jesus comes to dwell with us. Right here, sin and all. And so we give thanks to God for him, for his life, for the honesty with which he comes and meets us where we are. We don't serve a Savior who lives far away on some cloud; we serve one who lives in these same very streets, who is incarnate in our neighbor, who calls us to love each one of them.

- A man who lives alone, and is at loose ends dealing with the terminal illnesses of his parents. Can we see Jesus in him?
- A couple who live in a tent, and who need expensive medicine each week because of preexisting conditions. They have no automobile, no source of income, nothing to eat. Can we see Jesus in them?
- A man who wanders by the church every few months seeking prayer for depression. He knows how to get real treatment, but is trying to make it on his own. Do you see Jesus there?
- A woman who is bitter and angry, and won't let anyone come see her, even her children! Can we see Jesus in her life?

In all of these, we should be looking for the presence of Jesus. He stands with everyone we encounter, the homeless, the hurting, the immigrant, the ones demanding justice. He is the personification of God's demand that we show justice and love in our every action! He does that, and calls us to do that as well.

Let us follow Jesus, full of grace and truth, that we may receive the gifts he offers us so abundantly!

Thanks be to God!

Amen.