



Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA

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Nativity of Our Lord, December 25, 2020

Sermon Title: "No Place the Word Would Rather Be"

Sermon Text: John 1:1-14

One year for Christmas in my childhood, out of town family came to stay. In our three bedroom home, that meant we were one bedroom shy. I ended up sleeping on a rollaway cot in the basement, next to the hot water heater and the sewing machine. It was totally dark except for the little blue flame of the pilot light on the water heater, and the periodic heaving sound of a very tired furnace.

I don't remember how long they actually took up residence with us it felt VERY long. But of course I was never to act as if this was in any way a bother. Both of the bathrooms with showers were upstairs. I ended up learning more than you want to about their eating habits, how well they can or cannot hear, how long the bathroom will be tied up. No space feels like your own. And yet, one is expected and told repeatedly to "be on your best behavior." They are your family, and yet, we can't let them see fidgeting or quirks, or attitude. For a kid, and really anyone, its hard to sustain, looking all pulled together and like everything is effortless. As if who we really are isn't who they came to see.

I suspect that when those relatives left, we really hadn't fooled anyone.

If anyone has taken up residence at your place for more than a couple days, you know, the truth shines through. You see who they really are, and they, you. In part, it's why I love this passage from the gospel of John.

Yes, I love the lofty poetic "in the beginning was the Word..." and imagining the beginning of God's creating of the universe, meant to tell us that Jesus, the Word, was part of the Trinity from the very beginning. But I also love that Jesus, the Word, came and dwelled with us, literally took up residence with us.

Beyond the abstract image of God being with us, the incarnation, Christ's coming into the world, means that God is REALLY with us, like more than an overnight visit. There when we curse because we burned our finger in the kitchen, or were tired of waiting our turn, or someone has said something out loud they should've kept to themselves.

At the end of the day, knowing all our quirks, and all our shortcomings, and all of the times we will fail to recognize, or receive or believe as we should, God chooses to cross the threshold, so to speak, and fully enter our flesh and blood world, where we are eventually caught off guard, see in our flawed and unvarnished selves.

This comes as no surprise to God.

The surprise is that if God could choose to be anywhere, why choose our reality and fully immerse in it? Why choose the rollaway cot in a musty basement next to the old water heater, with the little blue flame breaking through the darkness and very limited bathroom access? Or any of the other places we actually dwell.

For Jesus, there is no place the Word would rather be.

Jesus, The Word, comes to fill the truth of our world with God's grace. To see us with eyes of grace, to help us encounter grace for ourselves, and to inspire us, like John, to testify to the power of our encounter so others might know this grace too.

This year, in all its upheavals, I think many of us have had time to come to terms with just how unvarnished our lives can really be, things people really think that maybe we wish we didn't know. But also how much we long for connections, even with our most inconvenient relatives.

I see people who have brushed with mortality itself clinging to every word they can hold from anywhere.

Yes, there are moments, we can recall where we did or did not believe one another. Or don't. And sometimes the truth has really hurt. But in the end, in our heart of hearts, in our little corner, I doubt any of us really wants to feel left in the dark, or that the past has already determined the future against us. Everyone wants to be truly known and truly loved. To believe that someone really wants to take up residence with us.

We have been given the profound gift that in Jesus, the embodiment of God's Word, we are given this love. Love that dwells in the two things that that John speaks of as the Word in the world- grace and truth.

We need both.

Truth, not only as corrective, but enlightenment.

Grace, not as tolerance, but as inclusion.

This is the Word that has come, bringing an ever-expanding arc of light. We just celebrated the darkest night. Whether we quite see it or not, each day

is a little less dark, as the Word is filling and encompassing and completing God's vision.

The Word, embodied in Jesus, has entered the world as a tiny baby entrusted to people like us. Christ enters still, bringing what we cannot usher in on our own, but we desperately need.

The Word has been and is the heart of God from the beginning and for all time. For us. The true light. Sent for everyone, coming into the world, to guide us.

Coming whether we recognize, or receive or believe as we should. This Word that cuts through all our other words like a beacon, to proclaim that God is here in our real world, in real time, in real relationship, wanting only that we believe in the power of this love, for ourselves and for the world. Because this is the will of God.

And since the Word comes to bring light to everyone, it means Jesus also comes to us everywhere.

Not only in places where we look or expect, but also in places where we wonder if we are forgotten or that feel God-forsaken.

Christ makes his home with us, even and maybe even especially when we are displaced, disoriented, or disconsolate.

Friends, if there are moments you have felt not believed, or received, know that the Word made flesh in Jesus, comes for you.

And if there are moments where you have been astounded by grace against all odds, dare to testify to the power of this holy love.

And if, perhaps like your preacher, perhaps all you are today, is weary or even distracted, remember, it is not up to you or any of us to make the Word come into the world. The Word has come and comes now because God chooses to share space with us. That's about the best news I can imagine.

Simply receive this love and believe it is for you and for all time. Allow God to help you dwell in this Word.

AS the hymns says, Where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in.

This Word, this Christ IS with us.

Thanks be to God! Merry Christmas!