

Christmas Day
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason S. Glombicki
December 25th, 2016

“In the beginning was the Word.” But I wonder, do words still matter? After all, political candidates speak words that seem to produce no action or change. Advertisers make empty promises to consumers about what will make us happy or successful. Words are constantly created, including Oxford Dictionary’s recent addition of “moobs.” That’s right, “moobs” as in “prominent breasts on a man.”¹ It seems that words have fallen on tough times; yet, today we gather to celebrate the Incarnation and remember the “Word.” What’s going on here?

First, we might notice the phrase “In the beginning.” Where have we heard that phrase before? In the beginning of Genesis, the first book of the Bible! Today John is making a bold move in our gospel. He’s essentially saying that he’s creating a new start to the Bible. Now, both Genesis and John take the word seriously. In Genesis God spoke a word and it was created. For example, “let there be light.” In John, there is a bit of a shift. John declared a new interaction with humanity. If you’ve been in my WPLC Basics class, you may remember that the term “word” has two meanings. “Word” in John means both the spoken or written word and it also means Jesus. The

¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2016/09/12/the-10-most-notable-entries-to-the-new-oxford-english-dictionary/>

new beginning John wrote reminds us that Jesus is God's reinvention of all creation, including God's own self. In Jesus, God made God's commitment to and love for the world in a new way, through ordinary human flesh.²

Don't yawn. Come back to me – you'll be back to unwrapping presents in a minute. Stay with me, because the Incarnation is a big friggin' deal. To recap: In Genesis, "word" was just the literal word spoken. Here in John "word" means not only spoken word and associated acts but also humanity. Jesus is the Word and therefore what he does, who he is, what he says are all ways we notice God. As one theologian puts it, "now God not only goes where God's people go, but God is who they are."³

The phrase "the Word became flesh and lived among us" is the most important and controversial statement of Christianity. This very assentation has provoked the most disbelief, argument, skepticism, war, persecution, and death. You see, Christianity is the only religion that believes in God's incarnation - the only one. We believe the incarnation brings salvation through wholeness. Salvation comes when we are rescued from our own destructive self-isolation within a nurturing human community. That is incarnation - being physically present with the other gathered together in love and care.⁴

² <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/12/christmas-eveday-a-christmas-beginnings/>

³ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3101

⁴ Hedahl, Susan K. *Proclamation and Celebration*. "Christmas."

So too this faith community gathers together. It is not a place to escape the difficult realities of the world. Rather, this faith community is where difficult realities are given meaning. As one theologian puts it, “It’s like if you were stuck in a subway tunnel during a sudden blackout. You can respond to the fear and darkness by using the remaining battery on your cell phone to entertain yourself with Candy Crush or by using that phone as a light to see others around you, to see the contour of the environment, and maybe even to walk toward a light source more reliable and powerful than your own.”⁵ In my experience, many churches want to help you numb yourself with entertainment, they want to pretend that the world isn’t broken, and they want to imagine we are not broken. We as a church are not about escapism. Here we dig into the deep difficult truths of our life. Here we respond to racism, sexism, heteronormativity, ableism, ageism, and xenophobia. We gather here to do that because we know that when we come together to do that difficult work we become the body of Christ.

Here, we take seriously the Incarnation. In worship, we engage all our senses, because our faith is one about bodies. During the baptism of Aaron hopefully you noticed that I laid hands on him – this is a sign of the incarnation. Soon we’ll pass the peace shaking hands or hugging – incarnation. We gather here in person, instead of

⁵ Bolz-Weber, Nadia. *Accidental Saints: Finding God In All The Wrong People*. “The Slaughter of the Holy Innocents of Sandy Hook Elementary.”

reading the Bible or a sermon at home – incarnation. We gather at this table to eat bread and drink wine that proclaim our God incarnated. With the incarnation, we claim that words alone are not enough, but rather that the embodied Word communicates so much more.

I have to admit that I'm not always good at that. I often say one thing and do something completely different. I say I care about others and then I selfishly do my own thing. Even this past week I got into a scuffle with a FedEx store employee over our church's tax-exempt certificate. I argued over \$1.85 for a parking sign - seriously. My words and the employees' words turned into embodied anger and frustration for us both. It was not my finest moment.

Yet, sometimes we unexpectedly get it right. Sometimes we put into practice this whole "word made flesh" thing. For example, in early November when our church had the opportunity to have a television series film here. Sure, we got a little income from it and it also helped that I adore the show they were filming, but it was more than that. You see, at the end of the shoot we were scurrying around the basement re-setting the space for our Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. I started talking to one crew member. He told me that he was Lutheran, had a really bad experience at his church, and that he had not engaged a faith community in years. He said the way they talked about God's love but then dehumanized people with shame and fear was something he couldn't take any longer. Yet, here at WPLC he told me that he saw us putting our words into

action as we opened our doors for AA and other community groups. He saw the hospitality that Mary and I offered. He saw our rainbow colors on the sign and he was floored at the love and acceptance. He told me that his view of faith communities had changed, and, in my words, he saw the Word incarnate.

“The Word made flesh and dwelt among us.” The Christmas season celebrates the incarnation. It celebrates the ways God becomes flesh in a messy world. It honors our God who chose an unwed, teenage mother to give birth to the Word. It acknowledges that the Word came into the world as a homeless child in an occupied land. It remembers that the presence of God was communicated through a bastard child whose life, death, and resurrection continue to remind us how to live a life full of love, grace and compassion. Throughout this liturgical year we will gather here on Sundays to become more aware of the Word made flesh. We’ll remember that our God was a refugee (Matthew 2); our God prioritized relationships over being right (Luke 15); our God restored women to wholeness (Matthew 9); our God lifted up the differently-abled (Luke 19); our God engaged with outsiders of different faiths and nationalities (John 4); our God accepted sexual minorities (Matthew 19); our God implored us to love one another (Matthew 22); and that our God loves us so much that no matter how often we screw up, God continues to make God own self known here, in this place, in our gathered community, here in that font, and here at this table. For our God is the Word dwelling among us, full of grace and truth.

So, there it is - that, my friends, is the gift of Christmas – the Word made flesh. Our God is not distant. Our God knows what this troubled world is like, and at the same time our God is in this world among us and working through us. Our God uses a word to show love and respect. Our God sends us out to be the Word in the world. Our God is the Word for the world. Amen.