

The First Sunday after Christmas Day
The Rev. Christy Dorn

12-31-06

Isaiah 61: 10-62:3

Psalm 147: 13-21

Galatians 3:23-25, 4:4-7

John 1: 1-18

“A Word for the World”

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us.”

Does God have a Word for us? John, the Gospel writer, says he does—and that God says it through his son, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Theologians call that Word the Incarnation. It’s a word we sorely need to hear.

The word “incarnation” means “to be made flesh,” or “to become enfleshed.” Barbara Brown Taylor, an Episcopal priest, tells a story about a new professor’s first experience with teaching via the Internet. The college organized a conference at which she learned how to post her syllabus online, establish a chat room, monitor discussions and grade student assignments—all without leaving her office! While appreciating the democratic and ecological advantages of online courses, this professor still could not imagine teaching students whose faces she never saw and whose voices she never heard, students with whom she had no human contact.

She shared her concern with other faculty, but they were all sold on the “cyberspace university.” “Some introverted students really blossom online,” one said. “You can reach so many more people,” another assured her.

She believed them, but there was still something missing for her. Then, it suddenly dawned on her. “The problem,” she said, “is that I am a Christian. I am absolutely sold on the value of incarnation and there aren’t enough pixels in the universe to convince me otherwise. My faith is in the redemptive powers of flesh and blood relationships, which cannot be simulated on any computer screen.”

Christmas celebrates how God is “enfleshed” for us. Through the Incarnation, God is saying forcefully, though not loudly, “I love you.” Time and again in the life of Jesus, we are made aware of God’s love. A poor widow cast her money into the treasury, and Jesus was glad. The rich stood by and boasted proudly of their wealth, and Jesus was sad. But the truth is that he loved the rich as well as the poor.

We look today to the central event in all history—to a life eternal but come to live among us—God said through him, “World, one and all, I love you.”

What else is God saying in the Incarnation? Surely that God loves us, but this too: “I want the best for you.” As Christians, our deep belief is that life lived through faith in

God is the best life of all. I hope you can hear God say to you, “I love you,” John put it this way: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth.” God came to be one of us in the person of Jesus. The promise of memory is that God is still with us and that we will never be alone.

God is with us. God is Immanuel to all who believe. As we receive God’s love made known in Jesus, may we offer that love in every thought and action of our lives. Because God’s life is incarnate in us, we embody and express that life in ever-expanding circles of grace and mercy and peace.

The challenge of Christmas is to continue to make that love “incarnate” in our own lives and in the lives of those we love. After some 2,000 years, it still isn’t easy. God’s way of love still seems dim and mostly untried. Perhaps that’s because the sign is not meant to be enacted by individuals alone, but by the body of Christ. The embodiment of God’s love is best seen in a community, a people.

The book of Ephesians (3:10-11) affirms the church as the chosen vessel for God’s ongoing revelation of love in the world. God calls the church to make known the mystery of God’s gift to the world. In other words, the church is the place where the loving way of Jesus is to be seen, known, and embraced.

What does that love look like? I’ve seen the face of love here at St. Wilfrid’s, and in every community of faith to which I have belonged. I want to share with you a story of another community of faith that embodies this love. It’s called the Community of Santegidio*. It was founded in 1968 in Rome by high school students who wanted to live the gospel more faithfully in their daily lives. This community has grown to be 50,000 strong. These are Christians who live by 3 simple commitments: they gather every day for common prayer, they make friends across boundaries (race, nationality, class, age, religion) in ordinary everyday contexts, and they serve the poor in face to face encounters every week. They do things like serve meals, welcome strangers, visit the lonely. Some might dismiss their simple methods—until you realize the results of their method. For example, they worked behind the scenes to make peace during a civil war in Mozambique. They brought leaders of the warring factions together. They broke bread with them and prayed for them and gave them space to talk. That was all. And a peace treaty was signed and kept.

Today we continue to celebrate the season of the Incarnation. Does God have a Word for the world? Indeed! God spoke his Word clearly but not loudly. God spoke it plainly and quietly. It is spoken in humility but would profoundly affect the whole world. If you are waiting for the shout, you may miss the whisper. It’s God’s Word—to you!

* www.santegidio.org/en/