

The Word Made Flesh

Second Sunday of Christmas
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Saturday, January 2, 2010
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Jeremiah 31:7-14; John 1:1-18

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Just a few Christmases ago, I received a gift I really needed and deeply appreciated: An up-to-date dictionary. Now, I know that may not sound glamorous or exciting. It's not perfume or jewelry or high-tech gadgetry. Not that I don't enjoy receiving perfume or jewelry or high-tech gadgetry. In fact, I can put on my earrings, wear my perfume, and listen to music on an ipod while looking up words in my dictionary, so any and all gifts are appreciated!

Every few years one needs to update their dictionary. See, prior to this one, the Easton household dictionary was a Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, circa 1975, the year of my high school graduation. It's been well-used and is presently well-worn, but most importantly, it is lacking some words we use today. My new dictionary contains them. Not a word like *ipod*, which is more recent. But you can find in this dictionary words like *Compact Disc*. *Hacker*. (Obviously, any technology advanced after 1975 but prior to 2002 will be found in my latest dictionary.) *Internet*. (Hmmm...it reads here "An extensive computer network invented by Al Gore..." No, just kidding. It really doesn't say that.) There are cultural things like *latte* and *snowboarding* and *junk food*. There are historical events that made names for themselves such as *Watergate*. (Although the break-in at the Democratic Party Headquarters in the Watergate apartment complex occurred in 1972, it was not part of the dictionary until after 1975.) I suppose if I compared entry to entry between the two dictionaries I'd find a host of new words generated in the past 30 years. Some of these words, naturally, will fade in importance as the years go by, while new words will take their place. How often do you speak of *antimacassars*? Those were the crocheted doilies placed on the top of my grandmother's *davenport* (oh, there's another words) in order to keep the davenport from getting soiled. And if I'd received a dictionary this most recent Christmas, I probably would have a book containing words like *blog* and *twitter* and *webinar* and *ipod*. Words like *staycation* and *memory foam* and *carbon footprint*.

I find words fascinating. John, our Gospel writer, is fascinated by words as well. Particularly one word. The *Word* with a capital W. John writes about the Word of God which speaks creation into existence ("Let there be light!"), and which reveals the very nature of who God is. John writes about the Word of God which communicates to us the fullness of his love and life. John says the Word has some kind of eternal relationship of interdependence with God when he writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." That's a mouthful. And a brain-full, too—this is complex stuff from John's pen. Let's just say a theological dictionary would use up plenty of pages to define *Word*.

Now, we could feel ourselves suffocated by some of the heavy-duty theological language here, or we could be patient and listen to John as he poetically describes our Lord Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate particularly in this church season. For John says Jesus **is** this Word. He is this Word, made flesh. John emphasizes some extremely important points here which undergird what Christians have confessed in the creeds for centuries. But those points are not only important for what we say in a formal confession of faith—they matter for us and our lives, day in and day out, as the children of God.

For example, John says right from the get-go that the Word was with God from eternity. Though Jesus, the Word made flesh, the Word incarnate, might be a new event for us (or at least only 2000 years old), the point here is that God's Word has always been with him, has always been part of his plan and purpose and will. Thus, Jesus Christ, understood as that Word, is not some trendy word added to the dictionary, like *junk food* or *twitter* or *davenport*, which may fade in importance when some other word is selected to take its place. This Word that is Jesus is not some human-made imaginative creation. Instead, John says when the Word became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus became for then and for all time the eternal bearer of God's love and life to us.

The purpose of a dictionary is to define words. And the words themselves? Why, a word is merely an assortment of letters and characters assigned to represent something. The word, in this sense, is detached from the thing it represents. It can only point to the thing it represents. Not so with Jesus as the Word. John writes, "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." You see, Jesus isn't a bunch of letters and characters assigned to represent God. He isn't merely pointing to God. He makes God known to us, because all of that goodness and power and love of God exists in him. All that God wishes to give us is received through him.

There's another difference between a dictionary's words and the Word made flesh. My newest dictionary resides on a bookshelf in our family room. My oldest dictionary I keep in my office. No doubt there will be moments when being able to look up a word will be useful—to figure out the correct spelling, or see if my husband's word on the Scrabble board actually exists. (He had a doozy of a word the other evening—*anneal*, which is a technique for making glass less brittle. Never heard of the word. I made him look it up and prove it, which he did.) Most of the time, however, those dictionaries will remain closed up, dust gathering on the tops. In a sense, just as those words are detached from the thing they represent, I am rather detached from those words. But John writes, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us..."

A young pastor went out one day to minister to a farm wife newly widowed. It was his first month in the parish, and he was still learning names, still figuring out traditions. When he got the call that that the farmer husband, Ed, had died, he went out to that farm with all the earnestness and energy his youth possessed and with all the academic acumen his mind retained from his seminary days. When he arrived at the farmhouse, this pastor said the best, caring words he knew to say.

He tried to convey his compassion and sympathy with every utterance from his mouth. But while in the farmhouse kitchen with her, the pastor noticed someone else walking into the room. It was another older woman, about this widow's age. She walked across, and with hardly an introduction, she embraced the grieving wife, saying over and over again these words, "I understand, I understand." The pastor later learned this second woman had just lost her husband within the previous year. They had lived on the farm two farms down the road. She did indeed understand, and her capacity for understanding and entering into the depths of the grief of this new widow made for a connection the pastor was unable to muster.

The Word became flesh and lived among us. Do you recognize the import of God's coming to us in Jesus? God has come to us in such a deep way as to say, "I understand, I understand." One early Christian theologian said the incarnation was God taking on himself all that makes humans human. Jesus Christ is his gift to us. The implication being that the Word of God is not remote or detached or strangely distanced from us, nor will it fade away over time, but the Word is here with us to stay, here to be with us in our world—our crazy, mixed-up, challenging, uncertain, scary, awesome world. And if so, then we have been graced with a God who actually understands us. He has come because he wants to embrace us with all he is at those times in our life when we are most needy, in order to offer us at the right and critical time his comfort and consolation, courage and strength, guidance and direction, love and forgiveness. That's the kind of God we need. That's the only kind of God who can help. That's the kind of God we have. **AMEN.**