



Sermon December 25, 2011

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Pastor

Sisters and brothers: St. John's prologue is a description of God so large that our wildest imagination is not adequate to take it all in. And of a God who is so sweet that we are all taken in.

The Word was from before the beginning. In God's good time the Word called the creation into being. From the giant star that warms this small planet to the tiniest molecule that makes up the structure of mountains and amoeba and our own bodies. All are created through the Word.

Then John makes the startling announcement. This Word of God has come among us as a Child. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth." A miracle imagined in the heart of God - "conceived by

the Holy Spirit” as we say in the Creeds. A human being “full of grace and truth.”

The Child is among us sweet as can be – not to take names and kick sand – but to take hold of our finger with his tiny fingers. We are charmed and not alarmed. He is a Baby whose smile melts hearts and invites all into God’s nearer realm.

A Child full of grace.

The Child full of grace has already changed people. Every one of us is invited into a newer and better sense of ourselves by the gracious regard shown us in the Child. And that is work that goes on and on and on. A loving, nurturing grace that is as eternal as the Word.

The hymn has it that “... grace taught our hearts to fear, and grace our fears relieved.” The Child changes people as the Child did for the slave ship captain who wrote “Amazing Grace” after the Child enabled him to see the evil of slavery for what it was. The Captain became what he was meant to be – a human being committed to the welfare of all human beings.

The work goes on. The Child has changed you in ways that only you and the Child will ever fully know – in some cases the changes in us are so subtle that only the Child fully knows about them. You have become more than you ever thought possible – because of the Child’s gracious involvement in your life. And what has already begun in your life is on the way to fulfillment in God’s future.

Someone had this inscription carved on a tombstone: “Please be patient. God is not finished with me yet.” Truer than true. God’s amazing grace leads people into the future and in God’s good time nurtures people toward their ultimate destiny.

The Child so full of grace is also full of truth.

Truth as the Child brings it into the world is not a matter of propositions. $2+2=4$ is a proposition. My third grade teacher would be proud of me for remembering, and please don’t confuse me with some new math which makes all of those hard earned facts irrelevant. Truth as the Child brings it is reality. In the Child all that is real is disclosed.

Real humanity is disclosed in the truth the Child brings. It is God saying, “This is a human being whose life is a model for your humanity. Allow the Child to show you the way to your truest selves.”

The Child discloses what it is to be a real man. Macho and manure start with the same letter, and that is not an accident. Macho is as foreign to being a real man as computers are foreign to movable type.

Men – as the Child discloses the truth – are meant to be strong without being mean. Men – as the Child discloses the truth – are meant to be nurturing without being controlling. Men – as the Child discloses the truth – are meant to be forgiving without seeking revenge. Men – as the Child discloses the truth – are meant to be loving without hating. Men – as the Child discloses the truth – are meant to be generous with the poor and needy without neglecting the larger measures of justice. Men – as the Child discloses the truth – are meant to serve all the people as the Child serves all the people.

Men – as the Child discloses the truth – are to find their fullest selves in human face of the Child.

And what is true for men is equally true for women. The Child discloses what it is to be a woman.

Lady Gaga is a caricature of a caricature of real womanhood. She and her kith and kin make a mockery of what it is to be female. The Child – full of truth - leads every woman into fuller understandings of their life in the world.

Women – as the Child discloses truth – are meant to be strong without being mean. Women – as the Child discloses truth – are meant to be nurturing without being controlling. Women – as the Child discloses the truth – are meant to be forgiving without seeking revenge. Women – as the Child discloses the truth – are meant to be loving without hating. Women – as the Child discloses the truth – are meant to be generous without neglecting the larger measures of justice. Women – as the Child discloses the truth – are meant to serve all people as the Child serves all people.

If the characterizations of what the Child discloses about being female and male sound parallel that is because they are. Every person is unique

and has individual roles. But, all people find their truest selves in the coming among us of the Child.

Of course not every person embraces the Child “full of grace and truth.” There is always opposition.

In the film version of Nikos Kazantzakis’ great novel “The Last Temptation of Christ,” there is a haunting scene where Pontius Pilate meets with the arrested Jesus. I get shivers every time I see it.

Pilate is regally dressed in contrast to the tattered clothes of the prisoner. Pilate is as oily a political figure as you would ever want to encounter. And he says in the slickest language, “We know who you are and what you want. But, the simple fact is that we do not want to change.”

The harsh reality is that Pilate is not the last to know the Child and the Child’s agenda, and more than ready to reject both. It happened and it happens.

The Church in its wisdom designated the next three days of the Christmas season as Martyrs’ Days. The Blessed St. Stephan is remembered

on December 26. The Blessed St. John is remembered on December 27. The Holy Innocents, Martyrs are remembered on December 28.

The intention of the Church is to remind all Christians that Christmas is not only a joyous event. It is also an event which changes those who are willing to embrace the Child, and the occasion for those with hardened hearts to try and destroy the Child and when that fails to kill the Child's messengers.

God's choice was to take the risk of the Word becoming flesh. Full of grace and truth. Ready to show us what it is to be loved by the One who brought all things into being. Ready to show us what we can be as human beings in the image of the Child.

Our choice is to embrace the Child or

Your presence here is a sign that you have room in your life for the Child. Your life in the world can be another sign that the Child "full of grace and truth" is the One you will follow into God's future.

There is a story about a village with a very wise man and a very cynical fellow. The cynic was jealous of the respect the wise man had earned and was determined to humiliate the wise man. He devised a scheme.

He would take a live bird in his hands, bring it to the wise man, and ask the wise man whether the bird was dead or alive. If the wise man said, "alive," the cynic would crush the bird and let it fall to the ground. If the wise man said "dead," the wise man would release the bird to fly away. Either way that wise man would look silly.

When the village was all assembled the cynic moved to the front of the crowd with the bird in his hands. He asked the question. "Is the bird dead or alive?" There was some hush among the villagers as they waited for the wise man's answer.

The wise man was thoughtful for a moment and then answered the question about whether the bird was dead or alive. He said, "It's in your hands."

"It's in your hands." The Christmas miracle of the Child come among us is unfolding. What will you choose about the Child? "It's in your hands."

