

Jesus is God's Plan A

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John 1:1-9

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

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At Christmas, we celebrate the incarnation. We celebrate the God become one of us, and one with us, in Jesus Christ. God's love changes things precisely because **God becomes what God loves.**

But more than that, *In Jesus, God gave us a human heart we could love.* While God can rightly be described with big, abstract words like omniscient and transcendent, *the truth is, we don't fall in love with abstractions. So God became a person "that we could hear, see with our eyes, look at, and touch with our hands"* (1 John 1:1).

Why does God love like this? Why did the one who was from the beginning choose to meet us in the middle?

The answer we usually give is: Because we messed up. Because of sin, God had to become flesh. By becoming flesh, Jesus could be the atoning sacrifice that appeases God's anger and that satisfies God's holy demands. Unless the Word-made-flesh pays for our sins, we will forever be in darkness. We tend to believe, and sometimes preachers even say, that Jesus would not have had to leave heaven if it weren't for our failure.

The problem is, John's gospel doesn't read that way. John begins his telling of Jesus' story in a way that puts this idea into serious doubt. John intentionally echoes the words of Genesis in order to say, in essence: **The incarnation was ALWAYS part of the plan.** Christ was present in the beginning. Through the power of Christ, all things came into being. Christ is another, more specific and more personal word to describe the generative love of God that speaks the universe – this wondrous *something* in which we live and of which we are small but significant part – out of *nothing*. Long before the garden, before the Fall, before there was any such thing as sin or death – God-as-Trinity planned to become part of what had been created in love.

Jesus Christ, entering into human history with the full measure of frailty and vulnerability each of us knows so well, was not God's plan B. The incarnation was Plan A. If you doubt this, I encourage you to re-read *Colossians 1:15-20 and Ephesians 1:3-14*. The incarnation *had to*

proceed from God's perfect love and God's perfect and absolute freedom (John 1:1-18), rather than from any mistake of ours.

Jesus did not come to change the mind of God about humanity; Jesus came to change the mind of humanity about God.

God never needed a Plan B because Jesus Christ is God's Plan A, and that plan is unfolding as it should – within God's loving and sovereign will.

Insofar as God became what God loves, we can do the same. We can love God by becoming more like God. Since the Enlightenment, it's too easy for us to keep love as something in our heads or as a soft sentimentality. *The mind is good* and our affections are important, *but* that is only a part of what Jesus recommended: "You must love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with your whole mind" (see Matthew 22:37). *That's full-body knowing! That is devotion.*

Jesus is God's Plan A because God knows we need to start small and work our way upward and outward to greater forms of love. It is not possible for us to love the whole world, or all of humanity, or God's own self – at least not at first. But as we learn to love particular, concrete things - this flower, this pet, this grandmother, this Savior – our capacity to love general abstract things can grow. Mother Teresa seems to have shown us how, in loving the poor and suffering person who was right in front of her, her love for "the poor" grew.

We can't skip the "small" loves in get to the "big" ones. By learning to love with specificity and with full-body knowing, our heart space grows.

What, or who, are the "small" loves God has used to help grow your capacity for "bigger" love?

What would it look like for you to experience a more embodied love in 2022?

Let me share the words of *modern mystic Howard Thurman (1900–1981)* to inspire you: *I want to be more loving in my heart! It is often easy to have the idea in mind, the plan to be more loving. To see it with my mind and give assent to the thought of being loving—this is crystal clear. But I want to be more loving in my heart! I must feel like loving; I must ease the tension in my heart that ejects the sharp barb, the stinging word. I want to be more loving in my heart that, with unconscious awareness and deliberate intent, I shall be a kind, a gracious human being. Thus, those who walk the way with me may find it easier to love, to be gracious because of the Love of God which is increasingly expressed in my living. "I want to be more loving in my heart!"*

Howard Thurman, *Meditations on the Heart* (Beacon Press: 1953, 1981), 168–169.

Isn't this why Jesus Christ came among us? Didn't he come so that, as we learn to know and love Jesus in a particular way, we find it easier to love the world Jesus lived for, died for, and is even now leading into resurrected life? What greater form of discipleship could we have than

to be the type of people that make it easier for other people to more loving because they are around us?

Conclusion. At the table, God is still active, still revealing, still coming close enough to touch. At the table, God is still empowering us to be the heart, hands, and feet of Jesus in the world.