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West Valley Presbyterian Church
A Year Of Testimony & Praise
First Sunday in Advent
AKA: Word
Rev. Dr. Kim Engelmann

There are certain words that get our attention.

“The Christmas tree is falling over!”

“There is only one cookie left!”

“The in-laws decided to visit after all!”

These words can be startling, interrupting proclamations.

Yikes! These words can change your behavior for the moment...

If the Christmas tree is falling over...you run to try to **catch it**

If there is only one cookie left...if you are wise...you will **grab it**

If the in-laws are visiting *after all*...you either start to get ready...or you get a quick flight to another part of the country

But Words are powerful things aren't they?

They can do more than just change our behavior for the moment

They can change our lives...

Now maybe you have been in a situation where the right word was uttered at just the right time...and you remember...what a difference it made!

I remember being very discouraged at one point in my life someone said to me

“God will be faithful to you.” I knew already that God was faithful. I could have told you that

But at that moment, the way the words were said, and the way this person looked me in the eye, the timing was just perfect

The right word at the right time

Changed my outlook, and gave me hope

There is a book *The Right Words at the Right Time* the author states... ***the right words can transform us. They can challenge us at a crossroads; they can help us through times of sorrow; they can dare us to action. They can be spoken with love or shouted in anger. The right words can be funny words, thought-provoking words, words that prop us up when we think we can go no further.***

Tom Brokaw's life was changed when he had a professor tell him in no uncertain terms, "Get your act together."

Or Al Pachino who came out of alcoholism because someone who cared about him simply asked, without judgment or condemnation, right when he was drinking too much "Al, how many times a day do you think you lift a drink to your lips?"

Or Laura Bush who as a child one night was lying on a blanket, looking up at the stars and a parent next to her said, "You know Laura, science is important, even for a girl." It made her pursue science with a passion.

The right human words at the right time can change our lives.

Now lets go a step further with this

If human words can change people so much...what about God's Word? Spoken at the right time and made manifest to us on our terms

In Bible 101 on Friday nights we are studying the gospel of John

Andyou know at first it is kind of **a let down** when you open up this gospel...because

In Johns gospel..... there is no inn, no angels, no shepherd, no manger , no Mary and Joseph at all...what a bummer! If John were our only gospel, there would be no Christmas pageant that we could act out...

We just get this kind of very abstract sort of opening about In The Beginning...**was the Word**...what is going on? How do we understand this?

But what John is doing is he is throwing us back to the book of Genesis – the first book of the Bible - where it starts off in just the same way...with just the same format...as the beginning of Johns gospel

Lets read these two passages together...

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome^[a] it. (John 1:1-5)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. ³ And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. (Genesis 1:1-5)

Do you see any parallels here?

John means to blow us out of the water with his prologue. He wants us to be amazed, astounded, transfixed. Are you?

He is taking the physical creation and saying Jesus came to create as well...but to create in us a new heart...*to bring creation back to what it was supposed to be like before sin entered the world...*

John is excited about this. He is saying imagine the creative force which is God's word... in Genesis

The expression of God's desire sent forth, creating new things

Imagine that power and expression of God's will and purpose

Becoming a human being...

What would that look like? What would we see, experience, take in? It makes me wonder, **what must Jesus have been like?**

God's WORD with flesh on? The creative power that called the universe into being, walking among us?

And Friends, when that creative word of God put on flesh and walked around among us down here – it was a NEW DAY...(*just like the new day that emerged at the beginning of the created order*) the light suddenly dawned in our hearts – fulfilling what creation was meant to be all along before sin entered the world.

God and us in close contact - personal relationship. JOHN WANTS US TO GET THIS CONNECTION...between the creation of the universe and becoming a new creation in Christ.

New creation is BIG in Johns gospel...its all through it...and its in Johns gospel where we find the words "You must be born again."

That's why John starts off, paralleling the creation account in Genesis... to the coming of Jesus Christ.

He wants us to know that in Jesus Christ you and I can become reborn, transformed, changed into a new creation. The darkness that was on the face of the deep before God speaks in Genesis he parallels to the darkness that is on the face of humanity because of sin – that Jesus who is the light of the world comes to dispel.

Do you see the parallelism here?

It is a new day in the Word become flesh! Just as it was a new day in Genesis...

1. God spoke the first time, on that first day of creation and light came into being. It was a new day.

2. God spoke the second time in Jesus Christ, his Word now in the form of a person, and the light of his presence was our life. It was a new day. We became a new creation.

Does that make sense?

Now John was also excited because he was writing in a milieu of different cultures and one of them was the pagan Greek culture. **The Greek term for “Word” that John uses when he writes “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” – it is the word LOGOS**

LOGOS was a word the Greeks knew well. Logos for the Greeks was an abstract concept associated with rational thought or reason. It really didn't have anything to do with the common person...or every day life.

Sometimes maybe some sermons or theological concepts might seem that way to you - abstract-- we leave that to intellectuals and theologians;

We think...well these concepts are nice to think about now and then – *maybe for an hour on Sunday...sort of out there...but not for the normal person living an ordinary life...right here... where I live...my day...my issues...my concerns...too abstract... too hard to understand for me...*

That is why John is so excited...in his letter...1 John (not his gospel) he is saying “this abstraction you call Logos became flesh...became like you”. Essentially God is not abstract or far away. **God is so relevant to you and to your life...so relevant...he became flesh and dwelt with you....to let you know that your life, your human existence matters and is of incredible value to him.**

Listen to 1 John...1- again this same theme...

“That which was from the beginning, (something we did not really know then...but something we were searching for) which we (now) have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.”

3 of our 5 senses mentioned right there...seeing, touching, hearing...the WORD.

God became like us and we apprehended him and got to know him, with our eyes, and our ears, and our touch, because he came to us on our terms. **THAT'S THE CHRISTMAS MESSAGE!** At Christmas God is saying...*"Hello there human race...let me just clear the windshield of your preoccupation and doubt... because I am relevant to you today, more than you know...So relevant...I am personal...I am real...get to know me...let me in...because I want to take your life...every part of it...every piece of it...And I want to make you a new creation through and through...."*

AND BY THE WAY...*Would you please get rid of your old images of an aloof, upset or angry, distant, uninterested, too busy to notice, kind of God?*

If I see a sparrow fall, and I clothe the flowers, and I know how many hairs are on your head, and if I BECAME FLESH FOR YOU, why would you think of me as not being supremely interested and aware of every aspect of your life?

SO...GOD SPOKE IN CREATION...

GOD SPOKE IN THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST (WORD Become FLESH...I am relevant)

AND GOD STILL SPEAKS TO US TODAY...

Ernest Snyder was a member of the National Guard and he was searching for a little 3 year old boy lost in Western Maryland in Cunningham State Park. The family had been picnicking and Wessie had wandered off.

Night was beginning to close in and Wessie was nowhere to be found. Even search parties with dogs had not turned up any scent of the child.Where was Wessie? Ernest went to talk to the parents. "We will resume the search as soon as we can" he told them...as soon as light dawns. The fear and panic in their faces grabbed at his heart...it grew close to freezing as night set in.

In a burst of uncharacteristic emotion for someone in the National Guard Ernest went into the woods and began to pray, choking back tears.

Oh God...he pleaded. Please help these people. Please end the suffering. Ernest didn't usually talk to God like this. He didn't normally think of God as relevant, personal, able to

intervene and make a difference in human life. God had always seemed like an abstraction, far away.

But this time he decided to let God in. It certainly couldn't hurt, could it?

Early in the morning, at the first light of dawn, Ernest started in on the search again. He got into a jeep with a deputy and some other search and rescue workers, and began to make his way up a very craggy dirt road that took them into a more rugged part of the mountains. They didn't think a three year old could make it up this far, but it was worth a try.

The jeep had a roaring engine so occasionally Ernest would turn it off so that everyone in the jeep could call out the boys name. Wessie! Wessie! But there was no response. And "then, Ernest writes, "as we were descending with engine roaring and...the radio going," "I heard the sound I can still hear today."

What Ernest heard was a voice. He said it was a deep voice off to his left somewhere. He writes, "I can still hear that voice to this day" The voice said "**HERE**".

"I slammed on the brakes, he writes. The others turned to stare at me. Not a sound came from the woods around us.

"What's the matter?" Trooper Mills said.

"Nothing," I said getting out of the jeep.

And yet there *had* been something.

I knew it sounded ridiculous, but I said it anyway: "I heard something."

At that Trooper Mills stood up and shouted Wessie's name. Immediately I heard another voice, but this time it was a child's voice. The others still had heard nothing. When it came the second time, I determined the direction and plunged into the woods toward it, the two troopers right behind me. Over rocks and fallen logs we scrambled, branches lashing our faces.

I reached him first, sitting behind a log, not at all surprised at seeing us. I scooped him up and hugged him tightly. "Where's Mommy and Daddy?" he asked me. "I couldn't find them. I bet they went home."

We assured him that they had not. And then we looked around for the direction we'd come in. We were 250 to 300 yards from the jeep. I remember that we yelled for Wilcox back in the jeep several times before he heard us, and when he shouted back, we could barely hear him.

As he caught sight of us, Wilcox radioed back that we were bringing Wessie in, safe and sound., Trooper Mills looked at me. "You could not possibly have heard that boy," he said.

"I know," I said. "I know" **It was God's Word that stopped me.**

Gods WORD still speaks to us today...as we approach this table this morning...God says to you and to me "HERE"... "RIGHT HERE"...

Find what you are looking for.

This table represents my humanity, my WORD become flesh and blood...in Jesus Christ

my desire to be in relationship with you and become as you are...and meet you in whatever situation you are in...

I am not distant. I am not an abstraction. I am the WORD become flesh, sacrificed on the cross, for your salvation...

STOP... HERE..and find. Find the child in the manger, that you are looking for...

Find the Word become flesh....Let us pray together...