

Embodying the Word

In the beginning...

These are the words that introduce the creation story in Genesis, a story in which God speaks all things into being. God said, "Let there be..." and there was. And God called it all good.

In the beginning...

These are also the words that introduce the story of Jesus in John's gospel. And in this story, God does not speak creatures into being - instead the Word of God enters creation itself.

The Word was with God, and the Word was God.
And the Word became flesh and lived among us.

Ours is a faith tradition woven with words. We believe that God is revealed to us in the words of prophets and scriptures. We believe that words have power - that God's words generated all that is, that our words to each other and to God matter.

Words are ideas, names. They allow us to communicate and understand. God's words enlighten us. Our words to God fulfill a relationship with the divine.

And yet, God did not stop at words. In Jesus, words became presence. The Word was no longer mediated by messengers like Moses or Isaiah. Instead the Word came to us in a more personal form.

As we have learned from a couple of years of Zoom meetings, some messages are best done in person. Distanced communication via phone or video or written word - or even

through tradition - this kind of communication will never be the same as face-to-face, person-to-person.

And so the Word of God became human. Now we have not only communication, but action and sensation and, well, as the gospel says, we have grace and truth.

Jesus incarnated “words” to make God visible to us. Jesus is God with skin and bones so that we can see what grace and truth look like and act like in the world. In Jesus, we are able to see and feel directly what God is like. And through this incarnate God, we have the power to become children of God.

Our relationship with Jesus gives us the power to make words real, too.

So, how can you incarnate the Word? How do you, as a disciple of Jesus Christ, let others see what grace and truth look and act like? These ideas are abstract until you live them in the world.

I’ve seen it done in so many ways here at St. Mark’s. Maybe you have, too.

You embody Compassion. Compassion as a word means “to suffer together.” It is what happens when you notice that someone else is having a hard time and you respond by wanting to relieve them by being with them.

Incarnate compassion looks like this: you have gone the extra mile to make sure that people who are still not safe gathering at church stay connected. You’ve called them, invited them to online meetings, run errands for them. There are a lot of people who might have been totally isolated over the past two years but for the small gestures from THIS community that kept them connected.

You have made Justice real. Justice means to “make things right,” and especially to make relationships right with God, with each other, with creation, with systems.

Incarnate justice is what love looks like in action. Some of the poorest families in Austin had food on their tables this year because their lives mattered to us and you wanted to make things right for them. We knew that helping them get the basics in life was a way of showing God’s love.

St. Mark’s has a special gift for Hospitality. Hospitality in our tradition is treating strangers and friends alike, it is a radical kind of welcome. It is also a characteristic of the Trinity - in which the love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit overflows to all of us.

We do that. This community has a love of God and of each other that extends beyond ourselves to welcome others.

Imagine the welcome a family from out of town feels when they come to a relative’s funeral here and are greeted by strangers bearing food, hugs, and stories about their loved one.

Imagine having to leave your home in another country in fear for your life, arriving in Austin with only the clothes on your back - and receiving food, clothes, and shoes from strangers - strangers from St. Mark’s - who care about your safety.

There are other words you and I can incarnate as we walk through the world as disciples of Christ.

Life

Light

Living among

Glory

Grace

Truth

My Christmas wish for all of us is that we continue finding ways to unwrap these words and bear them as gifts in the way we live our lives.

In our bodies, in our lives, and in creation.

Merry Christmas.