

The Word Became Flesh

John 1:1-18

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The gospels of Matthew and Luke introduce to the infant child Jesus, John introduces us to the Word of God who was with God in the beginning, the Word of God through whom all things were made. This Word of God, active in the creation of all things, the Cosmic Christ, this Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. What kind of an impact does it make on the world when the Word of God becomes flesh?

- John the Baptist saw Jesus, the Word of God who became flesh and dwelt among us, John the Baptist saw Jesus and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Talk about making an impact. The Word of God who became flesh came to take away the sin of the entire world.
- One of the first disciples to follow Jesus was a man named Andrew. Andrew spent a whole day with Jesus. Do you think a day with Jesus would make an impact on your life? You better believe it. Jesus made such an impact on Andrew that Andrew hurried away to find his brother, a man named Simon. Andrew told his brother Simon, “We have found the Messiah.” The Messiah is the Christ, the Christ is the anointed one. “We have found the Messiah” said Andrew to his brother Simon. Then he grabbed his brother by the arm and took him to meet Jesus. Jesus looked at Simon, the brother of Andrew, and said to him, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas.” When you translate Cephas, you have the name Peter. What an impact Jesus made on the lives of Andrew, and his brother Peter, perhaps the best known of all the disciples.
- In the Gospel of John, the impact of Jesus is felt in numerous ways. Wedding guests are baffled when he turns water into wine. Religious leaders are stunned when he drove the money changers from the temple courts and then promised that when the temple was destroyed, he would raise it again in three days. It was only later when his disciples understood the full impact of what Jesus meant by raising the temple that was destroyed...in three days. He meant his body. What an impact it made when his body was raised on that third day.

- When Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night, we learn that God's love is so great he sent his only Begotten Son so that whoever believes in him would not perish but have everlasting life. And we learn that the impact of this love of God is for all the world. For God so loved the world...
- The impact of Jesus was felt on a Samaritan woman who went to get a bucket of water to last her for one day and she left filled with living water that would last her a lifetime.
- In John we not only witness the impact Jesus made when 5,000 people were fed, he goes on to tell us that he is Bread of Life. In fact, in John there are numerous I Am statements Jesus makes. I Am is the name by which God revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush. Each time Jesus says I Am in the Gospel of John, we get the sense we are supposed to pay special attention to the incredible and amazing impact the Son of God has come to make.

I am the bread of life

I am the light of the world

I am the door...the door the sheep of God enter through to find life, which leads Jesus to say...

I am the Good Shepherd

I am the resurrection and the life...those words, at the grave of his dear friend Lazarus, what an impact those powerful words have made in countless lives in countless places through countless times of sorrow and loss...the hope that comes from knowing Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life.

I am the Way and the Truth and the Life

I am the Vine. When Jesus says he is the vine he invites us to abide in him, to be connected with him, to live in him and through him and with him and for him, for apart from him we can do nothing.

When the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us, he made a dramatic impact, a life-changing impact, a world-changing impact, an eternity-lasting impact. All of this because the Word of God became flesh, because the eternal Word of God took on human flesh, inhabited a human body, a body like ours.

Twila Paris wrote a song about the Body of Christ. The title is “How Beautiful.”

How beautiful the hands that served the wine and the bread and the sons of the earth.

How beautiful the feet that walked the long dusty roads and the hills to the cross.

How beautiful...how beautiful...how beautiful is the body of Christ. How beautiful the heart that bled that took all my sin and bore it instead.

How beautiful the tender eyes that chose to forgive and never despise.

How beautiful...how beautiful...how beautiful is the body of Christ.

And as He laid down His life, we offer this sacrifice that we will live just as he died: willing to pay the price...willing to pay the price.

How beautiful the radiant Bride who waits for her Groom with His light in her eyes.

How beautiful when humble hearts give the fruit of pure lives so that others may live.

How beautiful...how beautiful how beautiful is the body of Christ.

How beautiful the feet that bring the sound of good news and the love of the King.

How beautiful the hands that serve the wine and the bread and the sons of the earth.

How beautiful...how beautiful...how beautiful is the body of Christ.

A song like that, about the Body of Christ, the Body that blessed us when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, a song like that can make a lasting impact. I remember the first time I heard it. I remember who was singing it. It was a friend named Sandy. It was at our church in

Fresno probably thirty years ago. Her face was radiant as she sang about the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ makes an impact on us, a deep and lasting impact.

And then someone did a slide show while the song was being played. Pictures of Jesus doing the things that Jesus did, touching, holding, reaching, living, loving...how beautiful. It was powerful to see Jesus and to think of how beautiful his body truly was...not a beauty that was skin deep...a beauty that touched the deepest places of human longing, of human hurt, of human need. And then...and then...in that same slide show it moved from the person of Jesus, the body of Jesus walking the long dusty roads and the hill to the cross, and it focused on the Body of Christ, the believers who now make up the Body of Christ. We saw people we knew doing things Jesus told them to do, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, making homes for the homeless, comforting the mourning, blessing the children. These images of people we knew and people we loved doing the things Jesus wants his people to do, and the words washing over us with a wonderful richness, how could it not make a deep and lasting impact? How beautiful is the Body of Christ.

And then on many a Sunday morning here at Dunn's Corners, when we serve the bread and the cup, Grace will quietly play that beautiful song, that beautiful song about *How Beautiful is the Body of Christ*. The last words of the song say, "How beautiful the hands that serve the bread and the wine and the sons of the earth." His hands serve us. His hands serve us bread. His hands serve us wine. How beautiful. How beautiful. How beautiful is the Body of Christ.

The Body of Christ is beautiful, and it is most beautiful when the members of the Body of Christ, members like you and me, do the things that Jesus wants his Body to do. I want to share two stories that have always struck me as being very beautiful. A story appeared in Guideposts magazine in 1981 about a young mother who received word that her brother and his wife, her sister, and both the sister's children had been killed in a car wreck. She goes on to tell how she was numbed by the news and having difficulty accomplishing the necessary tasks to prepare for their flight back to Missouri to be with her family. At that point, a friend stopped by and simply said he was there to polish their shoes. In response

to her surprised look he recounted how during a family tragedy it had taken him over an hour to polish all the family's shoes. Watching this friend sitting on the kitchen floor polishing all their shoes reminded her of someone else sitting on the floor washing people's feet, a simple act of presence and service. "Now, whenever I hear of an acquaintance who has lost a loved one...I try to think of one specific task that suits that person's need—such as washing the family car, taking the dogs to the boarding kennel, or housesitting during the funeral. And if the person says to me, 'How did you know I needed that done?' I reply, 'It's because a man once cleaned my shoes.'"¹

A man once cleaned my shoes. I like that. And I really like that a man who was more than a man, a man who was the Word of God who became flesh and dwelt among us, knelt down and washed our feet. That's beautiful. And it's beautiful when his followers kneel down and serve others. How beautiful is the Body of Christ.

The other beautiful story is one I heard in a class I was leading. It was a class on preaching. One of the students got up and showed a video clip. It was from the Summer Olympics, the Summer Olympics held in Barcelona, Spain in 1992. That was the summer of the Dream Team, the first time the USA had professional basketball players on the Olympic Team, and so the big celebrities were Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson and a fellow who once wore number 33 for the Boston Celtics, Larry Bird. The dream team garnered its fair share of attention. But when this fellow in my preaching class got up and showed a video clip, it wasn't of the Dream Team. It was of a track and field event, the 400-meter run. And the clip didn't even show someone winning the race.

The video clip shows Derek Redmond, an athlete from the USA, lining up to run the 400-meter race. Apparently, he was a favorite to win a medal, perhaps even the coveted Gold Medal. For 150 meters he is sailing along smoothly, running with the leaders. And then he pulls a hamstring. He grips his leg in pain and hobbles a few more steps. The crowd gasps. You can see the agony on the face of Derek Redmond, both from the physical pain and the deep disappointment of losing his chance at victory. But Derek Redmond continues to hobble toward the finish line. Even though

¹ Alyce McKenzie, *Preaching Biblical Wisdom in a Self—Help Society*, 138, 139.

he has no chance of winning, he doesn't give up on the race. He doesn't quit. You probably know what happens next, because clips of this have been shown over and over again. An older man hops over a small barrier onto the track and runs toward Derek Redmond. The older man is Derek Redmond's father. And for the last two hundred meters the father supports his son and encourages his son at times almost carrying his son to the finish line.

The man in our preaching class got up after the video clip and tried to continue with his sermon. He couldn't. He broke down in tears. What he wanted to say was that in so many ways that is what Jesus does for us. We break down, we run out of steam, we get hurt, our stamina fades, the road is too rough, the path too difficult, and all of the sudden we realize we are not alone. There is someone beside us. And he props us up and he strengthens us and supports us, and he literally carries us. Well, the guy preaching wasn't able to say any of those things, but we all got the point.

That is what Jesus does for us. How beautiful the Body of Christ, the Body of that man named Jesus who came into this world, who became flesh, because we needed someone to come alongside us in the race of life and lift us up, and bear our burden, and carry us in our weakness, and comfort us in our sorrow, and hold us in our fear, and lead us in our life. How beautiful is the Body of Christ. And how beautiful when the followers of Jesus, when the members of his Body, when his church, comes along the least, the last, and the lost, and lifts them up, and carries them on the journey of life. All this, because the Word of God that was with God in the beginning, has become flesh and dwelt among us. How beautiful...how beautiful...how beautiful is the Body of Christ.