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Grace, River Forest

All Flesh

The Word became flesh and lives among us.

Those words are spoken today in Mandarin and Malay, English and German, Ukrainian, Portuguese, Spanish. Just to name a few. Those words from John's prologue will be translated across time until they become words for their bodies.

The question still reverberates in my soul. It was summer 2020 when it was asked of me. It was during one of the meetings in my call process here at Grace. We were meeting in fellowship hall. Socially distant. Masked. Each person took a turn asking a question. Yet, this one stuck out. I hadn't been asked this many times before. I think it says something about you. Us.

It was "Who is Jesus Christ and why does it matter?"

This question and its faithful answers from the lips of Christians from Iraq to Ireland, Ethiopia to Estonia, Tasmania to Thailand, Oak Park and River Forest, for millennia, has broken open locked doors and created futures beyond the past and present that hold us captive.

For those of us in North America, we are invited to hear the answer to this question from the lips of those brought here against their will. Folks who were victims of chattel slavery and its horrors. The words of the Spirituals playing in the background.

"O Jesus my savior, on thee I'll depend, when troubles are near me, you'll be my friend" or "When I was seeking Jesus, and thought he couldn't be found, The grace of God came in my soul, And, turned me all around."

As articulated in M. Shawn Copeland's *Knowing Christ Crucified* "Meditating on Jesus's ministry to the poor and oppressed, the enslaved people loved him as a bringer of life. They understood the otherness of Jesus. He too, was a stranger in a world of death and oppression, meanness and hate. Jesus was for them: God's black slave who had come to put an end to human bondage. Jesus' resurrection meant that death would not be the last word. That slavery would not be the last word. The God who vindicated Jesus would vindicate them. For "God labors on behalf of freedom to bring the fullness of life."

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The testimony and answer would have the same melody, even if the key is different for countless people in impossible situations.

The story continues as answers unfold in languages and places both near and far.

Those in bondage and oppression, wrapped up in sorrow and forsaken. People for whom the world has failed. They have always found a friend in the one born of the peasant woman from the forgotten backwoods of Nazareth.

Words have power. Words create worlds. Words reshape and reorder realities. For them. For us.

Who is Jesus Christ, and why does it matter?

As two Lutheran theologians confess: Christ--is an assault on inherited pagan ways of conceiving of God (you fill in the blank)-- and seeks to interpret the reality of God by what happens with Jesus. By his flesh. As God meets us in the human Jesus-- So, God is. Period God has not reserved any part of God's character from God's involvement with Jesus.

The word from the beginning is the one born in a manger. God has no face to behold other than the face of Jesus Christ as the writer of Hebrews tells us.

In other words- Jesus Christ is God-- born for you. Enfleshed deep in your life.

Through faith we see a God who no longer resides on high, but dwells low. God forever with flesh and blood. Divinity revealed in weakness and vulnerability. Our faithful God will so descend upon our frail and finite world, that this God will even be found in death. The miracle of the incarnation-- born again at the limits of this world for you. At the borderlands. In the hospital, in prison, the cellar of despair, God is born. On a roma cross and an empty garden tomb. God's word is reverberating across the eons.

Here at your end- God's word finds you. This word proclaims in his body that a future will come out of your every loss- even out of your every death. An unconditional promise is made to you. Today. As others have said: this is something only God can do. And, it is what Jesus does. This word-- resounds and reorders your very existence.

Jesus Christ- is God's answer for you on this Christmas morning. He knows your language. Your story. Your scars and wounds. He sees your shame. And has heard you weeping at midnight. When the world turns away- he comes close. Your questions and longings and laments are welcome and held in his embrace. Wide enough for however you find yourself. He has come to you wrapped in our vulnerable flesh from the other side.

Jesus Christ-- is God's answer/insistence that cancer and dementia, bitterness and anger, betrayal and loss, tyrants and despots, white supremacy and greed and all of sins schemes will not have the last word. Your future is bound up in his. And, there, life, against all evidence to the contrary-- always comes out of death. In that future, love heals a multitude of hurts and triumphs over fear.

Hudson and Dylan will embody this for us. The word will come to you- this morning. In this water your future will be sealed with the HS as you are marked with the cross of Christ forever. You will pass from death to life. Clothed in his flesh. These waters will carry you through your days. Filled with joy and disappointment, brokenness and beauty. You will experience all that it means to be human. Born of God, these waters will lead you to God's eternal shore where dawn breaks into endless day.

How might we answer together? Jesus Christ is hope, compassion, mercy, grace, the image of the invisible God, bread, wine, our tomorrow, our dawn in darkest night. The beginning and the end. Our salvation. Our life. The one who rolls away the stone from all our tombs. The word made flesh.

And, as his body on earth, we join all the baptized, as inspired answers to the world's questions. So it is said of us "how beautiful are the feet of those who bring peace."

As Susan Palo Cherwein wrote, "O dwelling of glory, o people of morn, the holy one always desires to be born, so may we like Mary enfold God the guest and greet with rejoicing this luminous feast."

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+In the name of Jesus. Amen.