

Pastor Troy E. Medlin  
Christmas Day, 2024  
Grace, River Forest

## Risky Words

And the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

There's something risky about it. Not just after the pandemic, where social isolation was a necessity. It is becoming more and more ubiquitous. It is easier than ever to experience everyday life without a personal, face-to-face encounter. You can go grocery shopping, utilizing self check out, if you even go to the store at all. You could simply order groceries and have them placed at the door at your convenience. With the emergence of AI, texting can take us many different places without leaving our personal space.

Let me say- these modern day inventions are incredible acts of hospitality for many people. Those who live with anxiety, chronic pain or illness, compromised immune systems, or work difficult and long hours. Those who we already kind of hide away.

It does a good job of separating us from others though, doesn't it. Especially as many of us crave those face-to-face encounters.

Our current cultural moment makes reaching out "in person" feel a bit risky. Looking someone in the eye is different. There is something about sitting next to someone so you can put your arm around them. Or sharing a table, or conversation punctuated by the wiping of shared tears or contagious laughter. Body language. Tone of voice. Posture. Presence. Proximity.

There is the risk of encountering other bodies. Those different from ours. Risk of personal disclosure. If people get to know the *real* me, what might they think? If I am more than the persona that I have cultivated, how will people respond? If I tell the truth about the brokenness and fragility of my body- what might happen next?

I remember when I was in elementary school and meeting some relatives and pulling up my long socks at first trying to hide the fact that I was wearing braces on my legs. Risky.

Here we are with our bodies. The ones that break down. Betray us. The ones with aches and pains. That need help. Our tired bodies. frail and fickle. Not to mention all that we carry inside our flesh and bones. It is a risky thing to have a body. It opens us up to so much joy and grief. What words have others placed on your body? Which words have you placed on yourself? What words reverberate inside you?

Parker Palmer writes, "In the Christmas story, God — an airy word if ever there was one! — takes the risk of incarnation. The flesh God chooses is not that of a warrior but of a baby."

The infant Jesus, born in a back-woods town, nursed by his courageous teenage mother, surrounded by animals, from his first cry pushed outside, to the edges, to the margins, among the lost, lonely, forgotten, fearful ones; that is the Eternal Word. The one who forever makes his home with those the world passes over, who lifts up the ones who are bowed down, and who will traverse every death haunted valley of our lives in his own wounded and broken flesh. The body

that will be abandoned, and betrayed. Whose voice will cry out again in utter forsakenness as he breathes his last and dies, is the fullness of God, emptying God's self for your sake.

And the one who speaks your name as he rises again, leading you and all this weary world into abundant, lasting, life - this is our God. The one who only and forever meets us in this Jesus.

As another preacher put it, "At the end of all our striving and longing we find, not a force, but a face. All language about God is metaphor. But the metaphor became flesh and dwelt among us."

There's more. This child, born some 2000 years ago, this word living and active- not bound by time or space any longer- just your flesh in endless love comes all the way down to you. There is no distance he will not journey to look you in the eye and embrace you. Today.

The word resounds- beloved. You belong. You are loved. You are forgiven. You are not forgotten. God is the one who remembers you. There is room. God is never far away- even when God feels a million miles off. Take Christ into your hands and into your body. Believe it with whatever faltering, failing, faith you can muster- it is enough. And when you can't that's okay- the word has got you.

We now bear this word in our bodies. These bodies. So- it makes sense that faith, trust, and risk would all go together since we belong to this God. We have nothing left to prove.

Parker Palmer continues- We long for words like *love*, *truth*, and *justice* to become flesh and dwell among us. But in our violent world, it's risky business to wrap our frail flesh around words like those, and we don't like the odds.

Yet, here we are- our lives hidden with Christ in God. What are the odds? Baptized ones- heralds from the future. No wonder we can say: how beautiful are the feet. Your feet. That bring good news. Risk encountering Christ- in bread, wine, stranger, hungry, poor, naked, imprisoned, in this assembly, and in the crooked places of your life- and bow in his presence. What kind of resurrection business might begin to unfold? Even at the very beginning we know the end of the story- and so we go out and tell it on the mountain- over the hills, and everywhere. Every. Where. Listen, someone's already started.

And the word becomes flesh and dwells among us.