

John 1:1–18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

“The Word became flesh...” I’ve had to preach at more funerals than I care to remember; but one thing I’ve come to know and respect is that in each of us, in each human life, a word becomes “flesh.” For good or ill, each of us becomes the embodiment of a statement, a message, a word... Each one of our lives is going to tell a particular story...of truths honored or lies told, of hopes ruined or faith kept, of love won or love lost. Each of us will be a word made flesh. “What will be the word or message of my life?” I sometimes ask myself. Although I know that despair can tempt a person to think that he or she means nothing, I have yet to encounter a meaningless human life. I have just never come upon a life that means nothing. Every one of our lives means something, and conveys a meaning to those with whom we share community and world. “What will be the real meaning of my life?” Although I sure want to shape and direct the meaning of my life, in the end it will be those who survive me who will decide what my life means and has meant. I must hand over to them my life as a word made flesh, and let them glean its meaning.

“The Word became flesh...” I’ve had to preach at more funerals than I care to remember; and one thing I’ve come to notice is the growing popularity of loved ones standing up before the funeral congregation to offer personal remembrances and stories of the deceased’s life. Some of the eulogies or testimonials can be touching. Others can be tedious, if not embarrassing. And yet in those personal remembrances or eulogies I’ve noticed something that’s a bit disturbing to me. Almost no loved one ever mentions the deceased person’s faith. Even if the person who died was an avid and active believer in Christ Jesus, his or her loved ones will mention almost everything else about that person’s life, except his or her faith. We will hear of many

good virtues, important contributions to loved ones' lives, and even funny stories and silly idiosyncrasies – but no word about the deceased's faith and its effect on the others in the circle of family or friends. Is it so politically incorrect to speak of a loved one's faith, even at his or her Christian funeral? Or have we all come to feel so inadequate in giving witness not only to our own faith, but also to the faith of one we loved? I wonder...

At any rate, I want you to know that I have wasted no time in over-reacting! I have already cajoled and harassed my poor wife: "If you let people talk about my life at my funeral, and no one mentions what my faith in Jesus Christ has meant to me and how I tried or failed to live it – I'll come back to haunt you...and your shoe closet!" Nothing like a little inspirational rant, is there? My wife just listens, softly smiles, and gives me no indication whatsoever of whether she's going to do what I want.

"The Word became flesh..." In everybody's life some word is going to be fleshed out. What word, message, or meaning is your life going to embody? And will people get the message? Or despite all your best intentions and efforts, will your "life" get messed-up, misconstrued...or misread? Will people get the message – will people get the word that you hope your life embodies? Or will they just take the money, the idiosyncrasies, or the stories and run?

"The Word became flesh..." As John penned the opening to his gospel account of Jesus of Nazareth, he writes astounding things! Born a human being, Jesus' life is also destined to embody a word. ...Only it's not just "a" word; it's not just any word; it's THE Word that Jesus' life embodies. It's THE Word that has become flesh in the person of a first-century Palestinian Jew named Jesus of Nazareth. ...THE Word that from the beginning was with God, and that is God! ...THE Word that is the mysterious meaning and inscrutable sense to all the universe.

...THE Word that is the baffling story of the life and person of God almighty – all there in the confines of a mortal born of Mary in a dirt-poor country on the far edge of civilization and beset by disease, violence, want, and real death. ...THE Word that is the mystifying story of God's own life and person – all there in the confines of a mortal born of Mary, suffering under Pontius Pilate, crucified, dying, and being buried in the mind-numbing heap of our human history.

...THE Word, on the third day rising from the hopelessly human dead, ascending into the wonders of heaven, and seated at the right hand of all that is holy, true, and eternal. THE Word became flesh in Jesus! The meaning and sense to all of vast time and space is now embodied in the meager lump of mortal clay that answers to

“Jesus.” Wow! John’s claim is so astounding. Can it possibly be true? Or has the gospel writer taken the stories, the idiosyncrasies, and the dreams, and gotten carried away?

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.” There we have it. The Word which Jesus’ embodies is the story of God that is Grace in this uncaring universe, and Truth in this world of the Lie. That’s the meaning, the story, the rhyme that Jesus’ life is to embody as God. But will people get the message? Or will his intentions, his acts, his hopes, his risks and achievements – will his “life” get messed-up, misconstrued ...or misread?

“The Word became flesh...” In sweeping honesty John tells us that the awesome mystery of the incarnation of God is met with the awful mystery of our sin. “He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.” The Author of it all is treated as an outsider by all. The God who knows the people of the Lord so utterly is utterly unknown by the people of God. Those closest to the Life that is the Light of all just don’t see the Light at all. The very people of God just don’t get the message that is...God, in the flesh for all to see.

The awesome mystery of the incarnation is met headlong by the awful mystery of our real sin. The blindness of human pride and the darkness of wrong and evil – it all works on us and in us to make us misconstrue, misread, and miss THE Word that is Life in Jesus Christ. Ah, but sometimes great darkness only makes the Light of Truth appear *more dazzling* to some. And sometimes callous blindness only makes the Touch of Grace *more riveting* to some. The Word became flesh... The awesome mystery of the incarnation is met with the awful mystery of sin; and the stage is set for the Spirit’s surprising mystery of faith. “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.” The incarnation of God confronts the real sin of our world, and suddenly faith is the amazing channel for our becoming a new creation – the children of God.

“The world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.” What John tells us is not only astounding; it’s upsetting! Our world does not like what John exposes. The world does not see the Light because the world is obsessed with its own glitz and glory. We live in a world that always wants to move up to fabulous glory, and so it misses the God who gets down in humble love. We live in a world that believes everybody has some divine light of his or her own; and so it is blind to the true Light

that exposes the ways of our utter darkness and sins.

Although we sure want to shape and direct the meaning of our lives, in the end we must hand over our lives as words made flesh to those who survive us, and let them glean our meaning. So too, Jesus. In the end he has to hand his life over. But suddenly by his torn and suffering flesh – and then by the astounding risen beauty of those precious scars – it is not we who are determining the meaning or the word of Jesus' life: it is Jesus as THE Word who is determining the meaning of our lives.

“The Word became flesh...and we have seen his glory.” It is true that we cannot see the Word made flesh in the Christ Child; but very shortly we will indeed behold the peculiar glory of that Word made flesh...and blood in the simple, spectacular wonder of Holy Communion, where you will see and touch and taste the Body of Christ, given for you!

“The Word became flesh...” In every human life, a word becomes flesh. What will be the word or message of your life? Will it be a witness to THE Word, THE Light, and THE Life that has come into the world? Or will it be just another version of the same old story of the world's callous blindness and slick darkness? Do you want a funeral where loved ones make no mention of the faith by which you became a child of God? Do you want a funeral where there will be all these words about your idiosyncrasies, and yet no mention of THE WORD that took hold of your soul, challenged your life, and just so changed your destiny?

“The Word became flesh...” I've had to preach at more funerals than I care to remember, but what I've come to treasure is how Grace and Truth have come...in Jesus...to take hold in these mortal lives of ours, so that we become part of His audacious story as the Word made flesh.

You know, *your life* may be the only Gospel that someone else ever reads. My brother, my sister, *your life* may be the only Gospel someone else ever reads.

“The Word became flesh and lived among...us.”