

Like in Every Respect
Rev. Nicole Farley
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
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Hebrews 2:10-18

¹⁰ It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, ¹²saying,

‘I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters,
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.’

¹³And again,

‘I will put my trust in him.’

And again,

‘Here am I and the children whom God has given me.’

¹⁴ Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. ¹⁶For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. ¹⁷Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

Matthew 2:13-23

¹³ Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.’ ¹⁴Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I have called my son.’

¹⁶ When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. ¹⁷Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ ‘A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,

Rachel weeping for her children;

she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.’

¹⁹ When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.’ ²¹Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, ‘He will be called a Nazorean.’

Throughout our church year we cover in great detail the “who,” “when,” and “where” of Jesus’ life on earth. Last week, and through Advent, we focused particularly on the “how” Jesus came to be with us. Our readings today lean into the “why” and “what.” For me there is definitely a measure of wondering “why.” I certainly believe John 3:16 - for God so loved the world that God sent God’s only Son - but for me, like I suspect others, the hardships and horribleness in humanity come rapidly to mind. Especially following a year when people in general have focused on the negative in others at the expense of any positive, why wouldn’t it be difficult to understand why God would want to join us?

I recently watched a brief video of a project which had Asian American parents and grown children standing in silence, looking at each other, for four minutes. At the end, most people were in tears, children and parents alike, “I love you” were exchanged, parents spoke of remembering back to when their children were born and of how they want the best for their children, and children spoke of how parents sacrificed so much for them.¹ In their experiences, I think I saw an answer to my “why.” God doesn’t look at us like we look at one another, at strangers, acquaintances, even at friends and family sometimes. God looks deeply and sees clearly the beauty and the possibility and the wonder. God doesn’t need four minutes of silence to notice again these things in us, to marvel at the joy we have brought by merely being, to celebrate the possibilities which are inherent by our very being, to see clearly the wonder of all that has been knit together to make us who we are, flesh, bone, sinew, hopes, experiences, even hurts. And God gladly enters into the same form, knowing that

¹ NBC Asian America Presents... “Jubilee Project: The Bridge” <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/face-face-parents-children-share-four-minutes-emotional-silence-n693196>

God-in-flesh also elicits joy and bursts with possibility and embodies wonder-fullness. So this, too, is why God sent God's only Son.

And Vicar Lisa G. Fischbeck explains that "God became incarnate in Jesus, became human like us - not that suffering would be removed from us, but that suffering could be embraced head-on, fully embraced by Christ. Jesus fulfills his role as our Savior and Redeemer by suffering completely, even to the point of death. This is how he becomes the 'pioneer,' going ahead of us and clearing the way."² In other words, theologian Marcus Dods describes Jesus as "the strong swimmer who carries the rope ashore and so not only secures His own position but makes rescue for all who will follow."³ These are some of the "whys" a baby was born among the animals two thousand years ago.

The whole of our lives of faith are studies in "what" it means that this happened - that God became a tangible form in God-with-us - but today I'll offer just a little something which might serve as reinforcement of your understanding, what you have learned about you and God, or what might be a new addition to your understanding, perhaps a different perspective. Fischbeck wrote what I needed to read as reinforcement, saying, "God has become a human being, which means that, in a strange and wonderful and unprecedented way, God is with us."⁴ I already "got" the "wonderful" and "unprecedented" but somehow the "strange" had missed me. Sundays like today I will say, "when our risen Lord was at table with his disciples, he took the bread, and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him." but I have rarely, if ever, stopped to think that, for them, they sat across a table from God, actual God, and God whose name was too sacred to speak was handing them a piece of bread and washing their feet.

God in this form looked like any other human form, had the features which help us identify another as human, maybe even to the point of being considered non-descript. I think this possibility is reinforced by Herod's command that all male children under two be killed - God in Jesus wasn't obvious. We humans have faces and limbs and hearts and livers

² *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 1*, p. 160.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

and lungs. We humans, all of us, want to be in relationship with others, want to get along, want to know love, want to have shelter, want to have food. What it means that God became incarnate is that God washed his face, God hugged the people he loved, God slept and dreamed. What it means is that God's humanity, God's willingness, even God's determination to come to us in human form, demands we look at one another in our shared humanness. If God has such high esteem of us, sees such worth in us, then that is also part of our calling as Christians to do the same. Part of that beauty and possibility God sees within us is the capability to expand ourselves to look for the beauty and possibility and wonder in others. This is as good a year as any to see the world, and be in the world, with beauty, possibility, and wonder, don't you think?

Let us pray: God, for showing us the way **we** can be the beauty of creation, we give thanks. We pray you keep us mindful of this and push us to see this beauty in your children. Amen.