Sermon – October 25th, 2026 – John 1:1-18 – Unexpected Jesus: The Incarnation

There are certain things we do when we encounter a baby. We take deep breaths of their smell, we comment on their hair, we check in with mom about the feeding and the sleeping. And then we stare intently into their little squishy faces and say: “oh, she has her mother’s eyes” or “oh, that’s grandpa’s nose” or “they look just like so and so at that age.” We spend a lot of time trying to figure out who our children look like. When Neelah was born and people asked me where that red hair came from I would sometimes joke “Her Dad” (implying Neil wasn’t the father!)—I know, not very funny—since I knew it actually came from her great grandfather on my side and her great great grandfather on Neil’s side—recessive genes passed down through generations of regular old brown-haired babies!

We spend a lot of time and energy sometimes, trying to figure out just who the child looks like – sometimes I wonder if we spend too much time trying to figure that out instead of just enjoying who they are. Why? Why do we do this?

I think we do this because our bodies tell a story. Our faces, our fingers, our hair colour connect us with our history, to the people we come from. Our bodies carry pieces of the stories of our familial ancestors. Our bodies carry our genetics – those wee bits of DNA that determine our eye colour, our hair texture, whether our earlobes are connected or unconnected. Our bodies carry scars and stretch marks and wrinkles. They have joints that ache when the weather changes, and immune systems that overreact to certain foods. Our bodies carry the evidence of where we have been, and what we have been through. Our bodies tell our story.

The human body is wonderfully complicated and frustratingly mysterious. The human body is as Sarah Bessey describes them “mortifying and wonderful, uncooperative at times and gorgeous, capable and communicative, fragile and perfectly imperfect.”

And all of this matters when we talk about the incarnation, about God enfleshed in humanity. It matters because the incarnation is more than a simple theological statement: God became human through Jesus. Jesus was God in human form. Therefore the Word became flesh. And we sit in the pews and nod our heads and say “yup, that’s what we believe.” Really? It’s that simple? You’ll notice that John, in the reading we had today, doesn’t leave it just at that. John starts with big cosmic language marking the creation of the world, and it starts: “In the beginning was the Word.”

In the big vast nothingness before Creation, there was the Word. And the Word was with God. The Word was God. Everything that came into being through God’s creative act came through the Word. Life and light, the fullness of creation – all of it came into being through the Word. This is big Cosmic God language which can lead us to understanding God as beyond our understanding, too big for human brains to understand, far away and disconnected. But, and this is a BIG BUT you’ll notice that John doesn’t stop there with this bigger than the cosmos God. John goes on to say “The Word became flesh and lived among us.”

Wait what? The Word became human?

The Word became human, not an idea or philosophy but flesh and bones, muscle and blood. The Word had a body, weight and movement. The divine spirit was given a home in a body.

And that body was Jesus’.

Jesus, who had his mother’s eyes. Whose hands were scarred from learning carpentry from his father. Whose feet were dusty and cracked from walking the roads of Galilee. Jesus got hungry, tired, giggly and frustrated. He knew joy and anger and sadness and excitement. He needed alone time, he ate meals, he touched people, he was touched by people. Jesus lived in a particular place in time with all the political, cultural and religious realities that came from living in that particular time.

Jesus was beautifully, mysteriously, wonderfully ordinary and that is one of the most unexpected things about him. Why unexpected? Well, wouldn't you imagine that if God decided to come and hang out with us humans, that God would have found a way to make their presence really known? Like God would arrive with thunder, lightening, trumpets even on a mountain top somewhere in a way that would be totally unmissable. Instead we get Jesus, who comes as an infant that needs to be fed and changed and who cries in the night. Frederick Buchner once described the incarnation as something like a cosmic joke – the creator of the universe comes among us in diapers. Or as the Genie in Aladdin once said: "Great cosmic power, itty bitty living space."

It's kinda funny when you think about it. And it is deeply serious because the choice God makes for the manifestation of their spirit tells us something about the kind of God we worship. God did not keep their distance from humanity watching to see what it meant to be human. God took on the fleshy, breakable form of Jesus in order to make love and justice tangible for humans.

Dorothy Sayers described this beautifully. She said that in becoming human, God entered the whole human experience – from the trivial irritations of family life and the restrictions of hard work and lack of money to pain, humiliation, defeat, despair and death. In order to be fully present to us and to creation, God became what God loved. And by doing so, experienced the good, the difficult, the beautiful stuff that makes us human. And this matters to us as disciples of this incarnation of God's spirit because it helps us to recognize that God is not this far off, uninvolved God only involved with us when we are praying or worshipping or meditating or having some profound spiritual moment.

Sure God is in those moments. But this incarnational God, is also with us as we do the laundry, as we go to our appointments or work or grocery shopping. God is with us in the caregiving, the exhaustion, the crying and the laughing. God is with us on a Sunday morning and on an ordinary Tuesday afternoon.

The incarnation, no matter how we might describe it – God with us, God's spirit in dwelling in Jesus, Jesus as God's prophet… The incarnation tells us that there is no "rest of life" that is somehow separated from God's presence.

God entered human life and all that goes with that. Jesus told stories that rooted God in the ordinary things and lives that surrounded him – bread, water, wine, seed, sheep, widows, coins, dinner parties, farmers, fishermen, children, strangers, outcasts…

Jesus didn't separate God from ordinary life, Jesus found God there and then talked about it. And this is also part of the unexpectedness of Jesus because Jesus shows us what God is like. Jesus gave us a relatable, touchable, connectable experience of God through the ministry, teaching and compassion he showed the world. John tells us that no one has ever seen God, but then Jesus came along and all that God is was embodied in human form. And that God notices people, feeds people, touches the untouchable, sits with the outcasts and the leper. Jesus shows us a God that welcomes children, listens to the silenced, challenges the broken systems. This is a God who weeps, who laughs, who gets angry… Jesus embodies God.

If God chose human flesh as the place to reveal the Godself, then perhaps being human isn't the problem we think it is. Our humanity is not something that stands in the way of God's love. Our messy, complicated lives are not interruptions to our spiritual lives. Our humanity is where God meets us. Sarah Bessey puts it bluntly: "If you need less humanity to feel close to God, you are missing the point."

If you need less humanity to feel close to God, you are missing the point…Holiness does not require less humanity – we are not more holy or spiritual when our lives are less messy or emotional or complicated. No. God took on human form to meet us there in our humanity not erase it. God isn't standing on the sidelines waiting for us to be less human in order to finally reach them… God is already with us, elbow-deep in love with us. Which means the sacred and the ordinary aren't opposites.

Madeleine L'Engle once wrote, "There is nothing so secular that it cannot be sacred." Our humanity is sacred. Jesus came into this ordinary, real life not some sanitized perfect version of humanity. This means that maybe washing the dishes can be holy. Maybe sitting beside the sick can be holy. Maybe being present with someone who is grieving can be holy. Maybe laughing with a friend or doing the same boring task for the hundredth time can be holy. Maybe caring your aging body or someone else's aging body can be holy. Maybe resting or justice work or having a difficult conversation or listening, really listening can be holy.

Real life is absolutely holy. If the incarnation takes on human form, then we need to be careful about deciding whose humanity is worthy of dignity, welcome, respect, compassion and belonging. Every human being embodies God. Every human being has a story. Every human being has a history and a story and gifts and fears and hope. Every human being is wonderfully, frustratingly, beautifully human. Perhaps the question the incarnation invites us to ponder and reflect on is this: "Where might I see God in this person?"

It's the kind of question that shifts how we see the world. It refocuses our view on the neighbours and strangers that surround us. And it also changes the way we look at ourselves. The incarnation, the embodiment of God says:

You are not too ordinary for God.

You are not too messy for God

You are not too complicated for God.

Your humanity is not an obstacle to holiness.

Your ordinary life is not an obstacle to holiness

God has chosen to meet you there.

God has moved into the neighbourhood and suddenly there is nowhere that is ordinary enough, messy enough or human enough for God to skedaddle. God is still with us – this is the good news of the incarnation.

God is still with us

Here

In our bodies

In our homes

At our tables

In our relationships

In our work

In our grief

In our laughter

In our struggles

In our ordinary, imperfect lives.

Our humanity is where God meets us

God is with us.

And maybe that is the most unexpected this about Jesus after all.