

Christmas Day 2015
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Larson
John 1: 1-14

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

The Word became flesh, and lived among us.

There's something so important about being there in the flesh, in person. We know this, especially at Christmas, when we work so hard to be with loved ones. We travel long distances or clean and prepare to make our homes ready to host, just so we can be together in person. We long to be with those who are too far away, those who have died. At times like these, we're especially aware of how good it is to be together, in the flesh, and how hard it is when we can't be.

There are some things that words just can't express. Letters, emails and Facebook are wonderful, but they can't compare to seeing someone's face light up when you enter a room. And no matter how many times someone says "I love you" on the phone, or even on Skype or Facetime, it's so much better when you can feel them squeeze your hand, when you can breathe in their scent. There is something about flesh and bones, about being there in person.

I've been very aware of this as I've been reading Christmas cards and **trying** to get out my own. (There've been years I've sent cards in April; this might be one of those years!) But, I look at my list and see Suzanne and think, "oh, I haven't seen her for years; I wish we could get together." But, we can't - she's miles and miles away and so (someday), I'll send her a letter with a nice little note on the bottom.

I'm thankful that Christmas cards at least keep us in touch fairly regularly, but sometimes they leave me empty, with a little ache in my heart, because the words I write and read can't convey what could be expressed if we were together in the flesh. One Christmas letter I received was from a dear friend, Karen, who wrote in happy, gushing tones about all her children had done in the past year. But then she added, "Dan has only been able to make it home for four days this year so it will be good to have him home for Christmas Day". Dan, her son, lives and works just a few hours from his parents. Karen values family a great deal and it breaks her heart that her kids just don't seem to have time for her now. When I read her words, I longed to be able to go to Karen's house, sit down at her kitchen table, and just be there with her.

Or, think about Christmas letters you've written after years of loss, illness or struggle. Often times we try to sound especially upbeat and together in our Christmas letters those years, but if loved ones could come in the flesh and see the chaos in our houses and the stress

on our faces they would know that we need their support and prayers more than ever. One of my favorite things going around Facebook right now is the brutally honest Christmas letter. It is written by a mom describing how things really are in their family, not how society tells us they should be.

Words can convey a lot, and when they're all we've got, we'll take them. But there are some things words just can't express. What a gift then that God, that the WORD, became flesh and lived among us. God didn't just stay up in heaven and send down posts and emails and tweets or even long love letters letting us know how much we are loved. No, God came right here among us, in the flesh and bones to show us that we are God's beloved children.

The Word became flesh so that we might know how much God longs to be in relationship with us and with our whole world. And, when the Word came in the flesh as Jesus, Jesus didn't just give us a warm smile and a nice hand squeeze, as wonderful as those things are. Jesus gave his very body and blood, his whole life, to show us that nothing can separate us from God. Nothing - not sin, not violence, not death, not powers or principalities, nothing can stop God from loving us and the world.

Left to our efforts, things would not be good between us and God. Our sin is too great, our words are too empty. "Yes, God I love you," we say, and then turn away. "Yes, God, we care about your people, we care about your justice and righteousness," we say, and then turn away. No matter how hard we try, no matter how many times we try to say the right words, we don't live or love in the ways of God. But by coming to us in the flesh to say "I love you, I forgive you, I am with you", the WORD, Jesus Christ, has shown us that nothing can separate us from God.

And, for those of us who missed it the first time Jesus came in the flesh, Jesus comes to us today. Jesus comes to us when two or three are gathered in his name to worship. Jesus comes to us when the scriptures are read and preached because scripture bears the living word, Jesus. And, Jesus comes to us in the flesh and blood in communion. Jesus comes to us saying, "this is my body, this is my blood, given for you." I love you, I forgive you, I am with you.

And with this promise, this assurance deep down in our bones, we can be little Christs to all we meet. We can bear this message of love and hope in our flesh and bones and can share the living Christ, the Word made flesh, with the world.

Thanks be to God!