

Have you ever wondered what Jesus was doing in the 30 years between his being born and beginning his public ministry? Many believe that he lived a common life, possibly as a carpenter following in his father's footsteps. Apocryphal accounts suggest that he did miracles as a child; but the truth is we don't really know fully what he did except for that one peak into his life as a boy getting lost at the Temple.

In a book I recently read the idea was put forth that Jesus was simply becoming a part of the very fabric of the community and engaging in the daily ins and outs of life. If you think about it Jesus was learning what it meant to live our life. Jesus had entered into our world, literally stepping out of heaven and taking on flesh and blood with all of its limitations and weaknesses. (Phil 2:5-8)

That step from heaven to earth is the mystery we refer to as the incarnation. And throughout this Advent and Christmas season we are going to ponder what it meant for Jesus to enter our world and at the same time learn what the incarnation teaches us about entering our world. As we learn from Jesus example it will inform how we live in this world and how we transfer the gospel to others around us.

Our text for this whole series is found in the opening chapter of John's gospel. Listen as John introduces Jesus. (John 1:1-14)

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. Jesus, God himself, literally entered into our flesh; and as a result identified with us in every way possible. As a result of the incarnation God knows us completely, loves us fully and makes a way through Jesus life, death and resurrection for our relationship with God to be restored.

This mystery that we call the incarnation is first and foremost God's plan for revealing himself to us in a way that we can all see and understand. No one has ever seen God and so we are at a loss to know and understand God. But through Jesus entering our world and taking on flesh; if you want to know what God is like; just look at Jesus. Jesus said it himself in response to Philip's request to see the Father: 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.' (John 14:9)

Can you say that? Can you say, 'Anyone who has seen me has seen Jesus?'

In the same way that Jesus entered the world to make God known, you and I need to enter the world- literally be present with people who are looking for God- and make Jesus known through our presence in their life. What we should be striving for in our life is to be like Jesus so that we can say, 'Anyone who has seen me has seen Jesus!'

A few weeks ago I shared with you our vision statement:

We are a missional people that:

- Live our faith beyond Sundays;
- Connect with people outside our church;
- Build relationships that allow others to explore faith; and
- Encourage people to grow as disciples of Jesus.

That statement comes alive in the incarnation! Jesus entering our world through the mystery of the incarnation is our example of how we live out our vision, how we embody our mission. And if we follow Jesus example of being present and identifying with those around us then we can say, 'If you've seen me, you've seen Jesus.'

But the incarnation also reveals to us the fact that God is on a mission! Jesus entered our world out of love to restore, redeem and heal God's creation- and that includes you and me! So Jesus in entering the world demonstrates that God is a missionary; sending his son into a unique culture to reveal and witness to God. And here is the important thing for you and me; Jesus says, 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. (John 20:21)

We are sent! Sent into the world to enter into the lives of people who are desperate to find love that restores, redeems and heals! So if we are going to model the incarnation we need to hear Jesus sending us to be present with the hurting, those in darkness, and those who need be loved. And what better time of the year to be present with them!

The incarnation, this whole mystery of Jesus birth, is a reminder that God loves you; that God enters into your life in a way that his presence allows you to understand that God came to identify with you and your life; and the incarnation becomes our example of how we enter the lives of others around us.

We need to follow Jesus example and understand the power of entering into the presence of the everyday life of those with whom we live. If we can agree for a moment that relationships are the key for transferring the gospel from our lives to the lives of others around us then it means in the words of Alan Hirsch that we are 'going to have to be directly present to the people in our circle.'

Let me ask you a question this morning. How well do you know the people around you? No, not just the people you are sitting with here in church; but the people that are in your circles outside the church? Where you live, where you work, where you go to school, buy your groceries, etc.

You may know some of them by name; but have you entered into their life in such a way that you identify with them and know their heart?

I think that is why it took Jesus 30 years to move out of Nazareth and begin his ministry. Jesus knew that the most important thing he could do to make his message come alive was to identify with the people that he lived with.

I would suggest that most of us have very few relationships outside our family where we have really gotten to know the heart and life of other people. But if we are going to let the example of the incarnation inform our lives it will mean getting close enough to identify with the hearts of people in our circle.

If we are going to live our mission as a church and fulfill our vision as disciples of Jesus then we are going to need to have the same desire expressed by God in the incarnation. That means being motivated by love and a desire to identify with others so that they can see Jesus in you and me.

Just as Jesus life was the message; so too are our lives the message to those with whom we are present. Probably the best example of entering into and being present with people around us is the Apostle Paul. In 1 Corinthians 9:22 Paul says, 'I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.'

Paul was an expert at entering into a culture and identifying with people who were uniquely different from him. And when Paul entered into their lives they saw Jesus living through Paul.

The birth of Jesus-the incarnation- calls us to enter the world of others in a way that we are present with them to identify with them.

In the upcoming weeks we're going to lay out some additional ways that the incarnation informs the way we live. Next week we'll see how proximity is vital to living out the incarnation. Then we'll follow up with how powerlessness gives us an opportunity to serve others. And finally we'll talk about proclamation; all things that we learn from Jesus example of entering our world.

You know during Advent when we are exposed to so many additional relationship opportunities because of parties and get-togethers let's take the opportunity to enter into the lives of other people- not obtrusively, but compassionately.

May I challenge you to be present in the life of one person this Advent and Christmas season? Just one person that you will be present with in a way that you can get to know their heart, identify with the struggles they are having and listen to the questions that they are asking about life. And remember you don't have to provide answers; just follow Jesus example and be present and in doing so reveal the loving heart of God.