

PRESENTATION:

I once was at a church presentation where the speaker opened by asking everyone to stand up. He then started to ask a series of questions. If the individuals in the audience answered “no” then one would sit down, if you answered “yes” then you remained standing. (I won’t ask you do this but imagine it happening here.)

The first question was: “Are you an only child?”

A lot of people sat down.

The second question: “Are you from a small town?”

More people sat down.

the third question: “Was your father a carpenter?”

(You see now where it’s going)

Only a handful of people were left standing at this point.

The questions went on: “Did you only figure out what you wanted to do in life at middle age?”

“Do the people from your small town not like you?” and so on.

At some point, as all this was happening,

as the audience started to figure out how this was going to end,

the mood shifted and no one wanted to be left alone, to be the one person left standing... to be the “Jesus” in the room.

CARPENTER:

The presenter’s point was that *that* was what the people in Nazareth “took offense at.” Jesus was nothing more than just... *someone*... seemingly picked at random from the crowd. That was the scandal, the stumbling block.

How could it be? Jesus of Nazareth.

The carpenter? Really?

You could imagine the crowd, like modern-day HR reps, peering over his resume and saying: “This looks a little thin... not what we were really looking for.”

Scholars now think that Jesus/ Joseph might not have actually been a “carpenter(s)” exactly, but was really more of a ‘builder’ in general, a ‘craftsman’ who worked with metal and stone and wood, an ‘artisan’ who built homes.

Jesus' name then, properly Anglicized and Americanized, would be "Josh Smith."
His best friend, then, would be "Simon Fisher."
You know, "Andrew Fisher's" brother.
In other words, on the whole, a pedestrian lot.
No group, it seems, could have been so provincial,
no person at its center so exceedingly average.

And yet that was Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth,
—who also claimed to be "God" in some way.
It must also be stressed that 2000 years ago, it was utterly offensive to consider God
in that way.
As a reminder of this, we do well to consider our Jewish brothers and sisters'
prohibition on uttering the name of God,
As well as our Muslim brothers and sisters' prohibition on depicting God in the
visual form.
Those are reminders, in our family tree of faith, of the utter holiness of God.

INCARNATION:

Likewise, the crowd in the Gospel believed that there was simply no way that this
Jesus of Nazareth could be (Gasp!) God.... In response, Jesus does not spend a lot
of time trying to explain the abstract point of his divinity/ humanity—much to the
regret of future church theologians.
Rather he gets to work. He teaches and preaches and heals and shares bread. He
then empowers others to do the same as our Gospel passage suggests that what
Jesus can do, we can do as well today.

In the year between then and now, the church came up with this doctrine: that of the
incarnation which says that God became one of us, "Emmanuel" through Jesus,
literally "Emmanuel"—God is with us. God entered into the world through Christ
so that we might be a part of the corporate body of Christ.

God is then revealed in the countless ways in which humanity does God's work,
caring for one another, clothing the poor, healing the sick, and comforting the
lonely.
"God became Man," one Church father put it: "so that man might become like
God."

It's amazing, this doctrine, this “enfleshment” (the literal definition of *In-Carne*) and it might be so much a part of who we are that it's the air that we breathe and so we don't think about it too often

But it IS a unique emphasis of our denominational identity, so we should probably know what it means.

As Episcopalians, this has special resonance. When people call us the “frozen chosen” or “Catholic-lite” or “Whiskeypalian”... you should laugh and then say this:

In terms of mainline Protestants denominations,
the Lutherans stress the cross;
the Presbyterians stress election;
the Methodists personal devotions;
and the UCC stress social justice—
we Anglicans/ Episcopalians stress the Incarnation.¹

If you would then struggle with saying why that matters or give examples, here are a couple of ways that we live the Incarnation, right under our noses in July 2024, in all the messiness and humanness of this world

EXAMPLES:

1st, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church met last week, reminding us of our connection beyond this place, to our Diocese and to the Episcopal Church all over the country and the world.

General Convention happens every three years, as thousands of Episcopalians all meet in one city to compose a budget, debate resolutions. Platforms, banners, agendas, programs, revisions.

It's when where the proverbial “sausage” gets made and the truism might hold that the less you know the better off you are. I found myself at various times rolling my eyes at the proceedings and simultaneously wishing that I was there.

I was reflecting on it all, though, and thought, in our Gospel reading, for the crowd, it was offensive that God would be speak through a family member, through someone close to them. Then I thought that those at Convention, they are *my* family in some sense, they deserve our prayers and well-wishes and best hopes.

¹ Markham, Ian and Oran Warder. 2016. *An Introduction to Ministry: A Primer for Renewed Life and Leadership in Protestant Mainline Congregations*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 79.

2nd, and also calendar-related, we celebrated Independence Day this week. We belong to a denomination that takes our common life together seriously, takes citizenship seriously, that places a stress on involving and engaging in our communities, be it in the educational sphere, in schools and colleges, in hospitals and in business, and indeed in politics. They are all important. It's a part of our DNA, our identity and how we understand the Incarnation.

Here at St. Timothy's, we did our Faith and Politics Series back in the Spring, and I am eager to find ways that we can continue, as a congregation and a larger community, to talk about the intersection of the two during this calendar year of 2024, what I have called, overly optimistically, "Joy in 2024." Know that in the coming months, We are concocting something up for our Adult Education, Todd is planning a concert near the Election and local clergy, led by our Jewish friends at the Northern Virginia Hebrew Congregation, are working together to plan a tree, called the "Democracy Tree" in September as a sign of our unity and solidarity as faith leaders within our democratic experience of governance

CONCLUSION:

I don't know many people who wake up in the morning and shout that as an existential part of their lives but the Incarnation matters.

The Incarnation and our identity as Episcopalians means that it is important how we live our lives. It means Life is not a cosmic test or something to be drudged through, rather the hell or heaven that we create on earth matters. The Incarnation reminds us that life is a great gift that is infused with God's love via *our* hands and *our* feet that operate and work as Christ's hands and Christ's feet in the world.

What again then did Jesus of Nazareth work with?

Of course, he did not work, primarily, through wood or stone or metal but through the miraculous flesh and blood of those around him.

Through the hemorrhaging woman (whose story we heard last week), and through the blind and the sick, through his flawed disciples, through our connections at Cornerstones and LINK and our partners in Haiti and Lakota, and even through our own family members.

The question then is not about Jesus' occupation.

But how do we carry out Christ's work in our own occupations?

The question is not about who Jesus' brothers and sisters were, but how is he your or my brother and sister?

What does that mean for me?

How do we share the mystery of the Incarnation with the whole human family—yesterday, today and tomorrow?

AMEN