

“The Word in the Flesh Is How We Know God”

Sermon for Christmas Day 2021

John 1:14, 18; Mat. 1:20

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

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There is a basic premise in our relationship with God. It is this: “no one has ever seen God” (John 1:18). But how should we take this? What could “seeing mean?”

Maybe we think at first that it means physical seeing with the eyes. In that case, it is certain that we do not see God with our eyes. God is not visible to us. That is rather obvious, though, isn’t it. But oh how we wish He were visible. If only there would be some way that God could become tangible to us.

But this not seeing God also means some other things. The most important thing is knowledge. For us to be able to know something, we must be able to have access in some way to that thing. We must be able either to access it with the senses, like seeing, or be able to think that thing. We have already said that we don’t see God with our eyes. So we cannot access God as God is in Himself with our senses. We cannot touch something and say, okay, this is God. We cannot hear the wind blow and say: This is God.

I should stop here and emphasize something. When are talking about “seeing” God in the sense of knowing God, we are talking about knowing God as God is in Himself. We are talking about being able to know directly the essence of God.

So maybe we can think God. Keep in mind that this would mean thinking God directly, not by way of inference; that is, not by taking a look at creation and concluding, this must have been made by God; and God is, therefore, amazingly creative, wise, almighty, good. No. We are talking about being able to know God directly, not by inference.

So if we are unable to see God with our eyes, then maybe we can think God. This means looking into ourselves; into our minds. Certainly, if I want to know God, the first place to look is within myself.

This has been and still is a popular answer. It can take many forms. Rationalists say that you can find God within your own mind because you have the idea of God. And then they can come up with all kinds of fancy ways of trying to prove that God put that idea of God in your head. But then they also say that you can have an idea of the infinite God even though you are finite, that the idea of God you have in your head actually apprehends infinity. Your finite mind can grasp the infinite God. That, however, is not something the Scriptures and the Christian tradition affirm.

Then there is the answer of existentialism. You have found God when you live an authentically human life, whatever that is supposed to mean. Of course, just what that kind of life is is most often determined by the person trying to live that kind of life. In that event, seeing God is determined by you. Thus, there could be as many gods as there are people.

Then there is the answer of eastern mysticism and the new age. You can find God within because in some way you are actually a spark of the divine. “You are stardust; You are golden,” as the song said back in the 1960s.

But wait? How do I go about seeing this divinity within myself? You must shut out the world. You must disregard and tune out all of your senses. You must even stop the thoughts in your mind. These are all distractions. And once you do all of this, and learn how to do it really well, then one day the divine light will appear within yourself, and you will have found God.

This is called transcendental meditation.

But then this question is raised by the Scriptures? How can someone who has sinned against God think they can find God within? There is actually a serious misunderstanding of God in these ways of thinking. It is that God is holy, and where there is sin and rebellion against Him, God is no longer present, unless something else happens by way of atonement and covering of sin that God does. There is no way for the sinner to go chasing after God who is no longer present because our sin. How can a sinful human possibly exhibit authentic humanness? How can a mind blinded by sin possibly think God?

But then there is just simply this. We want to know what God thinks about us. We want to know what His intentions are. We want to know what God considers to be right and wrong and true and good. We want to know God's intentions so we can trust God and have hope and life in God. We want to know what God considers to be right and wrong so we can think we know how to live. And then, our human nature has the naturally tendency to believe that if I live according to God's right and wrong, then I will be right with God by doing so, and I will find God that way. Knowing God's right and wrong ends up being the way for our being acceptable to God.

With respect to being sure of God's love and good intentions, we look for signs. We look for what is happening in our lives. We look at our circumstances.

But then, things can happen. Hard and difficult things. Are they the sign of God's intentions? If so, then God must not be intending anything good to me.

There is a moral code given by God, and it is quite clear. Oh no! I just violated that moral code. I sinned. And what was the nature of my sin? One thing I can be sure of it was that I did not treat someone else like I wanted to be treated. I violated the basic sense of justice. Now my quest for finding God and the good that way is in jeopardy.

So maybe I can just feel God within. So I know God is with me when I feel good. But now I don't feel so good. God must not be with me. I have to get that feeling back. The Christian life and the Christian faith is all about getting the feeling back and holding on to it. But now I am using things to try to get that feeling back.

The point of all this is that there can be many ways that human beings try to know God. But they are dead ends. We come back to this basic premise: No one has every seen God. It is like a brick wall, millions of miles high and wide and thousands of feet thick.

So here is the deal. If we are to know God, then God must come to us. God must come to us revealing Himself, his nature, but more importantly His intentions and His will, His good intentions and the way of grace. God must come to us. If we are to find God, God must place Himself to be found. And this must be a sure place, a steady place, a place that does not waiver.

It must also be a tangible place. A place that is also connected with stuff of our world that we can know and understand. And then it must be in some stuff in which God acts for us to save us. Tangible ways that can be visible ways of knowing that the invisible God in His almighty power and love is with us. But tangible ways chosen by God.

This is exactly what God has done. This is what Christmas is all about. God the Word, that is, God the Son, has become flesh.

God the Son is called the Word. Of all the things thinkers have thought about what John means by calling God the Son the "Word," the most obvious has to do with communication, with disclosure of one's thoughts, intentions, and will by speaking in words.

So it is. God the Son is God coming forth from God to speak to us, to disclose God. There is a wonderful example of this in the OT in Jeremiah chapter 1 that I commend for your reading. There the Word of LORD—a person--came to Jeremiah and called him to be a prophet and put

His words in Jeremiah's mouth.

But this Word was also God. So this word is also invisible unless this Word would take on tangible form for us. And so it is. This Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.

What could we want more from God than that God should become one of us? To speak to us like one of us, human to human? There was a song in the 90's that asked that precise question: "What if God were one of us?"

God has become one of us. God the Word, that is, God the Son has taken on human flesh to come to us. This was foreshadowed in so many ways in the OT. It became wonderful living reality at Christmas. It lives with us still in the spoken and written word and the sacramental extensions of His enfleshment, His incarnation. He connects us to Himself in connection with water. He comes to us today in His body and blood in the bread and wine. And the Spirit is in all of this because He was anointed with the Spirit.

And when He became flesh, what was He full of? He was full of grace and truth.

And so God has come to us in His Son. And His Son has come to us as Son of Man, as one of us, appearing in our own flesh.

And there He would do something even more profound to be sure we know God's intentions for us; to enable God to come to us spiritually once again. God the Son in human flesh appearing would lay down His life in redeeming sacrifice, to redeem the sinner from the consequences of sin. He would cover our sins so God the Spirit could come to us and bring God's grace and peace to our hearts. And in this He would also show us that God is with us, no matter what, especially in the bad times. And that God loves us still and always. And that God intends grace and mercy toward us. And that God will give the final victory over evil, as God the Son in human flesh appearing rose from the dead in our flesh.

So we pause in wonder and awe today as we give thanks in thankfulness and praise, for what God has done in Jesus. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. In this the only begotten God has made God known to us, by coming to us in tangible ways. And He reveals His grace and His truth so that we can believe that God loves us no matter what and walk in His truth. His name is Jesus, the Word who has become flesh and dwelt among us. Thanks be to God. Amen.