

Lectionary Reflection

Second Sunday after Christmas

January 2, 2022

John 1:1-18

Preachers say they don't like preaching the Gospel of John for the same reasons people say they don't like poetry — it's hard to follow, they don't understand it, it's too abstract. On this first Sunday of January, we read about how the Word became flesh, but there is no flesh on these words, no specifics, no newborn babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. John's Gospel revels in mystery and metaphor.

In his poem, "Introduction to Poetry," Billy Collins mourns his students' response to poetry. Collins wants his students to hold the poem to the light, to press their ear against it, to "waterski across the surface." Instead, he writes, they:

"Begin beating it with a hose
To find out what it really means."

We need to position ourselves differently to read and appreciate John's poetry. He's not going to spoon feed us God's beginning, rising action, climax and conclusion. We need to hold these words up to the light, press our ear against them, and waterski across their surface. The reader must unpack for herself words like glory, grace, and truth. These words will remain abstract concepts until the reader engages them and puts her own flesh on them.

In her commentary on this text, Barbara Brown Taylor writes that "the coming of the Word made flesh has enabled those who follow him to embody God's word as well." (*Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 1) Taylor points us to verse 12 as evidence of this: "To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." Also, later in John

14:12, where Jesus says, “The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.”

Until someone acts on these abstract words of John, Taylor writes, until someone embodies grace and puts flesh on the way, the truth, and the life, they will remain mysterious and unearthly, good concepts that few have ever really seen.

The pandemic has led us to be all too aware of fleshy concerns, of disease, of airborne viruses that can contaminate our lungs, of necessary vaccines pumped into the muscle of our shoulder. But this pandemic has also led us to embody the Word: in the grace of health professionals working past exhaustion to heal and save; in the beauty of family and friends hugging and meeting again after long periods of isolation; in the truth starkly revealed that no matter how we segregate our bodies by race or class or nation we are all bound to each other — we can just as easily pass disease from one to other as we can pass acts of compassion, love and grace.

This second Sunday of Christmas we read about how the Word became flesh and lived among us, embodying God’s grace and truth. We are God’s children, born to do the same.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How did this passage intrigue, disturb, challenge, comfort, encourage or inspire you?
2. In what ways have you embodied the Word?
3. In what ways have you witnessed the Word embodied in your church or community?