

Sermon - Jeremiah 31:7-14 John 1:10-18 January 4, 2009

A New Year's Promise - God Getting Physical  
God in Us, With Us, Through Us – Now and Forever

In the beginning was the word – and the word was God's spirit moving over the watery chaos bringing new life out of disorder. In Jesus Christ God's spirit moved into the chaos of human history and revealed to us in his words and deeds a new and different and heavenly way to live on earth.

At the beginning of this new year – a promise - You will find God, if you seek God- in some very unexpected places. You will find God finding you, when you most need God - if you need God. You will find God who changes your life, if you will let God into your life.

And you will know this God by the name God claimed for God's most complete presence in our lives – even Jesus Christ. And the question is - in this very disturbing and difficult and demanding time - when we need so many things - peace and economic recovery, and jobs, and for some healing, of mind and spirit and body, or of broken relationships -

The Question is do we know that most of all we need God? Do we know that we need God enough to seek God – in some new and more focused ways in this new year – yes – of the Lord?

Please pray with me.

Lord of life. Of every new year and day and moment of our living. May the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of these your faithful and loving people, be acceptable in your sight, and your good word of guidance for us this day in Christ. Amen.

We can be, sometimes, deaf to God's word, and blind to God's presence. In the hurry of our lives, in the juggling of so many responsibilities we carry, under the weight of all the stuff we have to manage, even more stuff since Christmas, in the struggle to deal with hard times in our lives, we can be deaf to God's word and blind to God's presence.

A deacon in a very caring Church stumbled into this truth. She delivered a Christmas Poinsettia to a shut-in, along with a jar of homemade jam as a gift. The woman invited her to stay for tea and some toast with the jam. But the Deacon was very busy, and the woman seemed to understand.

Resigned, she said, please just put the jam in the pantry. And there the Deacon saw several jars of Church jam – from previous years - and - she changed her plans – and stayed for tea and jam on toast – and heard a story of the woman's courage and hope in her faith as she faced her life ending disease. And – the deacon saw in a new way how faith in Christ can work in life. God's presence in an unexpected way.

For Jim it was an old man – a bum we'd say. Jim saw him slumped against a wall outside a fast food place on his way to lunch. He stopped to help, remembering the Matthew 25 chapter he'd studied in the adult class at Church – about the least of Christ's people.

He offered to buy the bum – the man – lunch, and over a hamburger and more he heard the story, now too common, of a job lost, a marriage strained and broken, and booze as a way to hide from the pain. No bum at all. And so Jim made some calls and at least opened up some new ways for the man to go forward with his life.

And Jim said he felt closer to God than he ever had at Church. Where, of course, he'd studied the word, that, after all, started it all.

The word – started it all. That's John's message that we read. The word. And the word became flesh. And that's where we meet the God of all creation. That's where we know God, and God's presence in our lives. In the word, and that word at work in the world.

It's why month after month we meet here at this table. It's why we share bread and cup. To remind ourselves that we will find the God we seek, we will meet the God we need, finding us in the most common of circumstances, in the plainest of situations, in the most human of conditions.

It's the mystery of the Church. Yes, we come here to experience God's presence as we meet together to worship God, to praise God, and give thanks to God for God's goodness. And to ask God's guidance.

And – when we get here, we hear God's word, and that word sends us out from here into the world to really meet and know the God who is most present to us and for and through us – in all the common experiences of life.

Yes – this new year, if you want to find God, to know God, to experience more of God's presence in your life, Yes, this new year, come here. For here you will hear about the kind of God you seek to find. Here you will hear enough to help you hear and see God's presence in the very common experiences of your life.

These are not good times. Truly hard times for many. Times that test our faith – to be sure. Philip Yancey reminds us that in such times we can discover anew what can be trusted most – and least. He recalls the old Sunday School song - The wise man built his house upon the rock - The foolish man upon the sand.

In a time when our housing values were being built on the sand of shaky and shady practices, Yancey reminds us of the rock which cannot be moved, of faith built on the promise of God made to us in Jesus Christ. That we are children of God, and if God is for us who is against us?

In all things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. And that nothing can

separate us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. The word made flesh.

I don't know when or where in this new year you will hear that word or see the Spirit of the living Christ at work in your life. But I am convinced that as often as you and I eat this bread and drink this cup, and so remind ourselves of God's presence in the common experiences of our lives, and as we make time to study God's word this year, and find some way or ways to serve others in Gods' name and spirit, as we make these actions part of our lives this year, we will be prepared to find the God we seek, and to know the God we need. Who is with us and for us in this new year of the Lord.... Amen.

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