

Rev. Amy Bertschausen
“Body and Soul and Digital”
First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood
Sunday, October 11, 2020

I Peter 3:8-15

Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing.

*For ‘Those who desire life
and desire to see good days,
let them keep their tongues from evil
and their lips from speaking deceit;
let them turn away from evil and do good;
let them seek peace and pursue it.
For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their prayer.
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.’*

Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you;

John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

I am so glad and grateful to be here with you today. And I bring greetings of gratitude from Care and Counseling which you, as a congregation, have supported so beautifully, helping us bring mental health and spiritual hope and

healing to tens of thousands of people over our long history and partnership with First Presbyterian Church. It is a blessing to be partners with you. Thank you. But today, I'm just a guest preacher coming to you in October. A guest preacher in October. It's starting to smell a little bit like a stewardship sermon, don't you think? Well maybe it is. I'll let you be the judge.

A couple of months ago, I was driving in my car listening to St. Louis Public Radio, as I often do. And suddenly, I absolutely had to turn it off. It wasn't because I didn't like the story, or the words, or the content. In fact, I can't even remember what the story was about. I absolutely had to turn it off because of the distortion in the voice. It was more than I could take. At that moment, in that day, it wasn't the smooth and clear sound of a voice in a recording studio. It wasn't even the sound of a voice on the phone. It was the sound of a voice on Zoom or some other kind of internet connection. And my reaction was pretty much visceral. And I was taken aback by it. So much so that I knew I needed to reflect on it a while. I came to realize that there was something about the distortion of the sound of that voice that revealed to me the sense that we are disembodied right now. When, in this pandemic, we are unable to truly be with each other in body. Even if we are still working, whether at home or our workplace, we are constantly aware of the need to stay separated from most people most of the time. Most of our work, our learning, our worship, our loving, and especially, our grieving is physically distant. Even when our hearts are so close and intertwined.

We are wired by God to want to be together. We are made to love one another with touch and presence. We are created to hear one another's voices in person. We are physical beings aching to be together without thought of danger or fear without the reality that getting too close for too long could indeed be deadly for someone. In fact, I have a dear friend who is likely to die today of COVID 19. And, his wife will not be allowed to be with him and hold his hand because she too has the virus. They are so grateful for FaceTime, but it is not sufficient in a moment like this. What does it mean in this moment of human history to know that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us? What does it mean that God brought God's own very self to us in human bodily form of Jesus the Christ? How are we to understand the incarnation of nature of God, when we can't even be together in our own flesh and body right now? How do we know God in this moment of human suffering and distortion? How are we the hands and feet of Christ right now, when our options seem so few? What simple and perfect answers can I give you? None. I can't give you a simple answer to these questions, just as I cannot give simplistic answers about why there is so much suffering in the world ever. But it turns out our faith isn't about having all the answers, and never has been. Faith, it turns out, is about faithfulness. Just as most of us are aching to be in each other's presence, to hold one another, to eat and laugh and dance together, to mourn and cry together, to do the simplest and most profound things together, we are now getting the smallest glimpse of what it means to understand when we say, "The Lord be with you."

We have been separated in some ways from Jesus in body for centuries. Yet we know his presence with us is real. We know because we read and study and remember that fact together even when it is digital, like right now. We remind each other that the Lord is with us, and we give him bodily form every time we gather even virtually around the communion table. I'm building up my digital muscles right now, in order to tolerate the distortion so that I can be with people in all the ways that are available to me. I'm trying hard to engage in more non-work Zoom gatherings for the good of those I love, and for myself. I still need breaks at times. I still ache and yearn to be with my own son in New Mexico, who I haven't seen in the flesh since last Thanksgiving. My own heart is breaking for my friends, who at the time of death, cannot be together in body and soul to say, "Goodbye," and "I love you," one more time. But we are not helpless or hopeless. We have each other even with the distance. We have our stories of faith and faithfulness when God's people have suffered in the past. And, there is one tangible way we can live out our faith in a very meaningful way right now, by using something tangible that we hold so dearly. Here it comes, the stewardship sermon, our money. In this time of global pandemic, some of us have been devastated financially. Some of us have been relatively unchanged financially. And, some of us have benefited financially. I count myself in that last category from the recent sale of my home. I have benefited financially. If you are in the last two categories, I hope you will ponder your giving to the church, and this idea that God is with us in tangible ways. How can we become the hands and feet of Christ right now? You've heard that terrible adage, "Give until it hurts." Don't. Give until it feels meaningful and faithful. There is no greater gift than to live our faith. When there is so little we can give in person, in hugs and togetherness, we can make our love, God's love incarnate. When there is so much that is distorted, feels unnatural, when there is so much pain and suffering, knowing that we are both the sufferers and the servants, we hold fast and contemplate the meaning of, "The word became flesh and dwelt among us." We, you and me, are God's incarnate embodied love right now. This is both our hope and our map for moving forward. The Lord be with you.

