

2021-01-03 Word and Flesh

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artisanchurch.com

[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Jesse Peers]

Alright, so we've come to our reading from the gospel of John chapter one.

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 right, 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.

[Voice of Kim Stark]

Continuing in the reading in John chapter one, verse 10.

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. John testified to him and cried out, this was he of whom I said: He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me. From his fullness, we have all received grace upon grace. The law, indeed was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God, the only son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

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So, I want to start out here by asking you a question. I would love to get your input in the chat here in Zoom. And I know from looking at it later in the week that you have your own little conversation over on Facebook too, and I endorse that, I just can't see it right now, so I can't check out what's going on there, but I can see in Zoom and so I want you to put, in the Zoom chat, your favorite slang word from your childhood. Now we do have children in the group so let's keep it PG, but what's your favorite slang word from childhood? And if you need a more specific prompt maybe you can just think about this: how did people say something was cool when you were in sixth grade? Right. So for me I continue to use the word "rad" to mean cool, even though that hasn't actually been rad or cool since 1986. Okay, look! My lovely wife has put "rad" in the chat. That's great. That's why we're meant for each other. "Law", "groovy", "wicked awesome". Wow, I'm the one from Maine and I don't know where you get "wicked awesome" from, Scott. I see another vote for "rad", that's great, maybe I'm radder than I thought! I see "groovy", "cool beans", "the bomb". Okay. There's a lot of coolness here. I didn't see a "keen" yet. I was hoping we might see a "keen" from the 1950s set, but "gnarly" - that's a good one too. Yeah. Wow. I've never gotten such a fast and difficult to follow response from the chat, but that's really fun. There's lots of fun words in there. I would also like to share the fun story that I recently said in the presence of my children that a song, quote, "slaps", and they told me that I was never to say that again. But the song slapped! I don't know what to tell you.

Anyway, um, words do carry meaning and sometimes we have, as a culture, we adopt these words to mean something temporarily. Like in 1986 if someone had said a song "slaps" that would have meant nothing to me. Now because I'm barely, *barely* connected to pop culture I do know what that means, right? The word "radical" or "gnarly" did not mean cool until it did. And then, it doesn't mean it anymore once it stopped meaning that, right? I do see "gag me with a spoon" in the chat which is a great bit of slang that if you... if you plop it down into first century Palestine or anywhere in their Greco Roman culture probably would not communicate very well. Right? But these, these words kind of bubble up into our cultural imagination and our shared vocabulary and then sometimes they bubble down, right? And the reason that I say that is because there are some words like that in the Bible, right? And we do ourselves a great service when we spend a little bit of time trying to figure out whether that might be, what's happening with certain words in the Bible. And today, in this magnificent passage of scripture, which is one of my favorites in the entirety of Scripture, we have two words that are really important to understand what they mean. And one of them does have a cultural connection that probably doesn't apply to us anymore. And so I want to spend a little bit of time thinking about these two words with you today. And the first word is: "word", right? Which, by the way, could be a slang term for us today and now that I think about it.

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But John's gospel begins by saying: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Now, what John is doing in this prologue to his gospel is setting up Jesus as particularly important, right, to put it mildly. So he's saying that Jesus is the Word, that was in the beginning with God and the Word was God. So if the Word is Jesus, and Jesus says the Word, what part of speech is Jesus? Is Jesus a noun or a contraction? Is Jesus a verb? Is Jesus, an intransitive verb, whatever, whatever that is, right? Now that's not, obviously, what's happening here, when John says that the Word - that Jesus was the Word. It's not referring to grammar, right? Word in Greek, is the word "logos", my captions might get it better, auto-generated captions might get it better if I said "logos" because it's spelled that way: L-O-G-O-S. Logos is the Greek word for word, but it means much more than that. In ancient Greek philosophy the word logos took on a much deeper meaning and so you might see some English words that we get from it. Obviously "logo", but also "logic". And so the logos in the Greco Roman world is the great logic of the world. It's the mind of the gods. It's a kind of... think about how some people use the word "universe" today, right, which I think started as a joke from Tobias on Arrested Development. The universe wants me to be an actor, right? You remember that line? But we still say it maybe half jokingly and sometimes I think people who have kind of a vague, undefined spirituality might speak of the universe, kind of not maybe ironically, as this vast unknowable all present all inclusive presence in the world, right? And there's actually a lot of parallels between that usage of the word "universe" for us today, and how ancient people thought about word "logos".

So the "logos" was this all powerful, all inclusive presence in the universe that yet, was still very distant and removed. Unknowable, if you will. And if that meaning of the word Word that John is calling out when he writes the prologue to his gospel and says: 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. For us, we see the word and we don't make that immediate connection, but for John's original readers, I believe they all would have made that exact connection, right? And here - I'm trying to resist the temptation but I'm going to be unable to do so - to take just a brief rabbit trail about how we in the church use the word Word. When we say Word in the church we usually mean the Bible, which is very important to our life together as people of Christian faith, but which is not something that we should worship - because the Bible is not The Word. The Bible is the words of God in some sense that I think is very important for us, but the true Word of God, the final Word of God, is Jesus. So later in the prologue John says that the Word became flesh and lived among us and that we have seen his glory. And so here we find our second key word for today which is "flesh".

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Now I admit, I know, this is one of those words that might kind of give you the willies right? Like, and just be glad that I didn't ask you to put in the chat the slang terms or what are the normal words from English that make you kind of feel creeped out, right? Because then we'd have a bunch of people typing in words that are not like bad in a sense, but they all make us go "eww", right? I think "flesh" might be one of those words, and so it's maybe unfortunate that it's used in this way, but here let me try to just unpack this for you. Because "flesh" doesn't exactly mean the things that we might define it as: skin or fat or meat. I mean, it does mean all those things I guess, but the crucial point here is that the all powerful being who brought the universe into being, the God who is very being. The inspiring unsurpassed unimaginable unobtainable untouchable force of all life, the great logic of the universe - the Word in the Greek mind - that Word took on a body. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us - as Eugene Peterson says - moved into the neighborhood. And that means so much, it means so many different things, it means that Word becoming flesh means that people could and did touch God. It means that God became intimately identified with us humans, and it means that we humans became capable of identifying with God. It means that people had, and still have, the perfect example of what it means to be a human who walks in God's ways. It means that bodies matter. That they are holy and good, that they're worthy of great glory rather than the deep shame that we heap on them every day for more reasons than we care to count. It means that God became susceptible to pain, and to hatred, that God was then subject to injustice in the human world, that God could and did experience the evil that gets embedded into religious and political power structures. It means that God was ultimately able to experience death, and therefore resurrection. I could preach for a whole year on what it means for the Word to become flesh. I think the whole gospel, all of God's good news for the world, is right there in those two words. I don't have the luxury of preaching on it for a whole year, let alone the rest of the morning, so let me leave you with this encouragement.

I've been reminding you for a little while now that the Church celebrates the season of Christmas after Christmas Day, right, opposite how the rest of the world does it. So today is the last Sunday in the season of Christmas, and starting next week we are going to move on to the season of epiphany and the season after epiphany, and the church begins to think about what it means for Christ to be revealed to the world. So, on this last Sunday of Christmas, may you know in your bones, deep in the sacred body that connects you with the incarnate God, that Christ is here. That even today 2000 years after the birth of Jesus, we still know, and cherish the benefits of the fact that God took on a human body. May you be filled with the knowledge and love of the Word who took on flesh and make your own life become an embodiment of God's presence in the world at home, at school, on Zoom, at work, in your car, at the gas station, in

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the store. May God be incarnated, embodied, in you and through you, so that the light and love of Christ will shine wherever you go. Amen.

[End of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information, visit us at [ArtisanChurch.com](https://www.ArtisanChurch.com).