

Christmas 1B
Trinity, Bend
John 1: 1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.John continues, “ What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the **light** of all people.” John begins his gospel with these poetic phrases. Rather than tell the Christmas story with the angels and the shepherds, John starts with this theological premise.

He goes on to say, “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 people did not accept him.And the Word became flesh and **lived among us**. (Emmanuel God with us.)

I believe there are a couple of key phrases, “[He] is the light of all people” “And the Word became flesh and lived among us.”

I don’t know about you, but I’ve had the feeling this is a very dark year. Not just outdoors dark as it is always at this time of year, but for some emotionally dark and for others physically dark.

Just to name a few things. COVID has taught us new ways to communicate, but has also cut us off from seeing and hugging one another in person. Then there is the political confusion. The news shares all the negative things happening in the world; like a bomb set off in Tennessee on Christmas day.

How often do we recognize the Word living among us? We say that we are baptized children of God, but do we recognize him? Do we see him in our daily lives? How often do we look for the light of God in the people we meet or just as we drive around during this season?

Barbara Brown Taylor tells the following story.

Contrary to expectation, the poorest homes are often the most spectacular. If I had judged a decorations contest last year, first prize would have gone to a house trailer by the highway just south of town.

It is part of a mobile home park adjacent to the Catholic church, which is why so many Latinx families live there. The women and children can walk to church, and the Spanish-speaking priest can interpret U.S. law to those who are still learning it the hard way.

The trailer I admired was an eyesore by day, with dented baby blue aluminum siding and tiny sliding windows that stayed steamed up with all the breathing, cooking and living that was going on inside.

Gaudy plastic kids' toys littered the little strip of grass out front, which was dominated by a satellite dish and a late model Ford truck under a make shift carport.

By night the place was Wonderland. The satellite dish had so many-colored lights on it that it looked like a beached space ship. The carport was also rimmed with light, and the roof of the trailer had become a landing strip for Santa's sleigh, drawn by a full complement of reindeer.

I imagine that there were better uses for all of that money. I imagine there were children in that trailer who needed new shoes more than they needed a plastic Santa, as well as adults who needed justice more than they needed a fantasy of colored lights.

But what I am noticing this year is the holy spark that smolders underneath all the gratuitous tinsel and voltage. At least that is what I think it is.

While true believers lament the crass commercialization of Christmas and the loss of “Jesus as the reason for the season”, the Holy Spirit haunts the most secular ceremonies; a string of cheap lights to illuminate the darkness, a day off from the highway litter patrol to remember that the way things are is not the way they must always be.

These are not religious activities, but they strike me as the kinds of things Jesus might have worked into his parables. The kingdom of heaven is like a bunch of inmates set free to wreath the lamp posts in a shopping district. The kingdom of heaven is like a broken-down house trailer made beautiful for a child’s eyes.

There are all kinds of things wrong with the way we celebrate Christmas. We eat too much, we sentimentalize too much, we worry too much. Those excesses cannot douse the holy instincts that underlie them.

We really are hungry. We really do want to give and receive. We really do want to feel deeply, live peaceably, sleep soundly and rise renewed.

As the season continues those of us who believe we know where our instincts lead may do better by learning more about a culture that is different from the one we are part of, than by separating ourselves from it. God is in the midst of all of it, after all, still looking for new flesh in which to be born.

This is what Christmas is all about. Christ being born in us. Christ being born into our world. It is not an event that happened 2020 years ago and is over.

It is about God within us...in each of us. God in you and God in me. When we allow the Spirit of God touch each of us, we can reach out and allow the Spirit of God in the other person to touch us. Emmanuel God with us.

Anne Weems articulates it well in her poem *We Seem to Forget*

What concerns me,
 what lies on my heart,
 is this;
that we in the church
 papered and programmed
 articulate and agenda-ed
are telling the faith story
 all wrong.
are telling it as though it happened two thousand
 years ago
or is going to happen
 as soon as the church budget is raised.
We seem to forget that Christ's name is Emmanuel,
 God with us
Not just when he sat among us
 but *now*,
when we cannot feel the nail prints in his hands.