

## *“A life that matters”*

**January 2, 2011**

*Text: John 1:1-18*

### I.

The coming of the New Year is a richly symbolic event. It’s all about the newness, the moving beyond the old. It’s a new year, a new day ... which suggests new opportunities, new possibilities.

Symbolically, therefore, it’s a new beginning, a fresh start. In a sense, it’s a wonderfully liberating time of passage.

It’s time to let go of the past, to forget all the failures, losses and disappointments of yesterday. It’s time to forgive the mistakes and imperfections—the sins—all the things we wish we had not said or done.

It’s time to move on ... and to open ourselves, with hope and optimism, to the New Year that is before us. Because, always, the world is self-creating ... the spirit is on the move ... it’s a new day and the future beckons.

We need that. As individuals, we need it. As families, we need it. As communities and as nations, we need it.

Always, the New Year overflows with hope and promise. Our text this morning, from the prologue to John’s gospel, is bursting with this same hope and promise.

*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 ... 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’s tremendous hope in these words. First, in the sense that God is with us ... and has been with us from the beginning. But, secondly, that God is the source of life and that this life is the *light* for all people. And this *light* has come to us in Jesus Christ.

The Incarnation—the birth of the Christ child—is about life, our life. It’s about hope, our hope.

### II.

Moving on in our text from John, Eugene Robinson, in his contemporary translation, called *The Message*, offers an alternative version of the text—from verse 14 and

following:

In the New Revised Standard Version, which we use in our worship, it reads: *And the Word became flesh and lived among us.*

In *The Message* version, we read ...

***The Word was made flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish.***

What a powerful affirmation—that *The Word was made flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood*. Imagine that! Not only has God come to us in Christ, whose birth we've been anticipating and celebrating, but he *has moved into the neighborhood*.

That's not just any neighborhood. That's your neighborhood, my neighborhood ... our neighborhood.

What this reminds us is that the lives of all of us in *the neighborhood* matter.

Growing up, I had a strong sense of neighborhood. There were the Burkes and the Buckners and the Goodwins and the Gilmores and us, the Frantzes. We were *the neighborhood*. As children, we played together, had all kinds of fun together and also—generally—looked out for one another.

We were lower middle class, working families, for the most part ... trying to raise our kids, pay our bills and move into what we thought was the hope and possibility of a promising future.

### III.

It's reassuring to be reminded that the Word of God lives among us—the *Word made flesh and blood*—right there in our neighborhood.

Therefore, for us, today, the love of God isn't just some abstraction that we read about and hear about. It is flesh and blood and lives right here among us.

For people of faith, this is the hope of the world; and it's not isolated and protected off in some sanctuary or holy place. It's right, smack in the middle of the neighborhood.

What the prologue to John's gospel suggests is that—from God's point of view—**life matters**. Our lives matter. The lives of all of us, in our diverse neighborhoods, matter.

And the way we affirm this and honor this is in our doing for one another. It's in our caring for one another, our compassion and kindness for one another.

The coming into our neighborhood is an act of love. *The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood* because God loves us. And why? Because life matters. LIFE is what God is about.

#### IV.

An astute Rabbi once noted that *each human lifetime is like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. For some, there are more pieces. For others, the puzzle is more difficult to put together. But know this, he said: none of us has within ourselves all the pieces to our own puzzle.*

Going on he says, *everyone carries with them at least one, and perhaps many pieces to someone else's puzzle. Sometimes they know this; most of the time, they do not.*

The observation of the Rabbi is a reminder that we need each other.

- We complete each other. We're not robots. We're not islands unto ourselves.
- We're community. We're the neighborhood, where *the word made flesh* lives among us.

**A life that matters** is a life that understands that life is social and communal and that we're all in the boat together. At the end of the day, it's all about the LOVE.

We Americans are big on individuality but individuality isn't just a *freedom* thing where we're free to do our own thing. It's also a *responsibility* thing where we assume our share of responsibility for the community.

And if LOVE is what we are to be about, then individual freedom must always subordinate to communal responsibility. Why? Because that's what LOVE asks of us ... that we look out for one another—each of us doing our share ... doing what we can to complete each other's puzzle.

**A life that matters** is community-centered to the point where it simply cannot do otherwise.

#### V.

There's an old folktale about a village that was planning a gala New Year's Eve celebration. Every member of the village was asked to contribute a bottle of wine, pouring it into a huge vat in the town square. In this way, the wine would be available to everyone for a community-wide New Year's toast.

Again, the key was everyone doing their fair share to make the event happen.

Well, at midnight, the clock struck and the town leaders opened the spigots for the people to share the wine. However, raising their glasses for the toast, they all discovered that their glasses were filled with water.

Imagine that! Everyone in town had the same idea. *If everyone else put in a bottle of wine, they reasoned, how would anyone notice if I brought a bottle of water instead?*

Hey, what we do matters. And **a life that matters** is a life that overflows with *neighbor love*. It's a life that sees and values the BIG PICTURE, that we're all in this life together.

Each of us, friends, in our mind, heart and spirit, are channels for God's light and for the true gift of God's love.

And always, that light shines in and through any darkness which might come our way, and the darkness does not overcome it.

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

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