

**PRESENTATION:**

I once was at a church presentation where the speaker opened by asking everyone to stand up. He then started to ask a series of questions. If the individuals in the audience answered “no” then one would sit down, if you answered “yes” then you remained standing. (I won’t ask you do this but imagine it happening here.)

The first question was: “Are you an only child?”

A lot of people sat down.

The second question: “Are you from a small town?”

More people sat down.

the third question: “Was your father a carpenter?”

(You see now where it’s going)

Only a handful of people were left standing at this point.

The questions went on: “Did you only figure out what you wanted to do in life at middle age?”

“Do the people from your small town not like you?” and so on.

At some point there was only one person left standing and, as this was happening, as the audience started to figure out how this was going to end, the mood shifted and no one wanted to be left alone, to be the “Jesus” in the room.

**CARPENTER:**

The presenter’s point was that *that* was what the people in Nazareth “took offense at.” The realization that Jesus was just someone, seemingly, picked at random from the crowd. That was the scandal, the stumbling block.

How could it be? Jesus of Nazareth.

The carpenter? Really?

You could imagine the crowd, like modern-day HR reps, peering over his resume and saying “This looks a little thin and not what we were really looking for.”

Furthermore, scholars now think that Jesus/ Joseph might not have actually been a “carpenter” exactly, but was really more of a builder in general, a craftsmen who worked with metal and stone and wood, an artisan who built homes.

Jesus' name then, properly Anglicized and Americanized, would be "Josh Smith." His best friend, then, would be Simon Fisher. You know, Andrew Fisher's brother. On the whole, a pedestrian lot. Nothing, it seems, could be so provincial, so average.

It was not easy to think of God like that. In fact, 2000 years ago, it was offensive. As a reminder of this, we do well to consider our Jewish brothers and sisters' prohibition on uttering the name of God, as well as our Muslim brothers and sisters' prohibition on depicting God in the visual form. Those are reminders, in our family tree of faith of the utter holiness of God.

### **INCARNATION:**

It makes sense then that the first heresy that the early Christian church faced was not over Jesus' divinity, but over his humanity.

Likewise, for us today, the endless series of TV specials, magazine covers, books at Barnes & Noble all trying to determine the "historical Jesus." There are a lot of agendas at play there, but one, I think, is simply the same one that the crowd in the Gospel believed, that there was simply no way that this Jesus of Nazareth could be good enough.

But, for us, of course, this is the mystery of the incarnation: God became one of us through Jesus, literally "Emmanuel"—God is with us. Like the disciples, because of the Incarnation, we are empowered and compelled to go God's work here on earth.

Jesus does not spend a lot of time, however, trying to explain the abstract point of his divinity, rather he gets to work. He teaches and preaches and heals and shares bread. He then empowers others. Our Gospel passage even suggests that what Jesus can do, we can do as well.

As Episcopalians, this has special resonance.

I have heard it put this way: in terms of mainline Protestants denominations, the Lutherans stress the cross; the Presbyterians stress election; the Methodists personal devotions; and the UCC stress social justice—all worthwhile emphases, of course—

we Anglicans/ Episcopalians stress the Incarnation.<sup>1</sup>

It's a unique part of our identity—God entered into the world through Christ so that we might be invited into the corporate body of Christ. In the words of the Church fathers: “God became Man, so that man might become like God.” God thus is revealed in the countless ways in which humanity does God's work, caring for one another, clothing the poor, healing the sick, and comforting the lonely.

I can think of two ways that we live the Incarnation, right under our noses in July 2018, in all the messiness and humanness of this world

### **PRACTICE:**

1<sup>st</sup>, Special attention and focus, this week, is on our Episcopal identity because General Convention of the Episcopal Church is meeting as I speak. This happens every three years, as thousands of Episcopalians all meet in one city to compose a budget, debate resolutions. Platforms, banners, agendas, programs, revisions. (This year it takes place in Austin Texas. —Christine got out in time.)

That meeting may or may not be on your radar. This might be the first you have heard of it, or you might be following it breathlessly on social media, or it might induce some serious eye-rolling. I think at times I have had each of those attitudes towards it. I was reflecting on it, though, and thought, in our Gospel reading for the crowd, it was offensive that God would be speak through a family member, through someone close to them. Then I thought that those at Convention, they are *my* family in some sense, they deserve our prayers and well-wishes and best hopes.

2<sup>nd</sup>, it's fitting also then that we celebrated Independence Day this week. We belong to a denomination that takes our common life together seriously, takes citizenship seriously, that places a stress on involving and engaging in our communities, be it in the educational sphere, in schools and colleges, in hospitals and in business, and indeed in politics. They are all important. It's a part of our DNA, our identity and how we understand the Incarnation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Markham, Ian and Oran Warder. 2016. *An Introduction to Ministry: A Primer for Renewed Life and Leadership in Protestant Mainline Congregations*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 79.

## **CONCLUSION:**

That identity claims that it is important how we live our lives. Life is not a cosmic test or something to be drudged through, rather the hell or heaven that we create on earth matters. The Incarnation reminds us that life is a great gift that is infused with God's love via *our* hands and *our* feet that operate and work as Christ's hands and Christ's feet in the world.

What again then did Jesus of Nazareth work with?

His vocation as a carpenter hangs by the thread of this verse.

But, of course, he did not work, primarily, through wood or stone or metal but through the miraculous flesh and blood of those around him. Through the hemorrhaging woman (whose story we heard last week), and through the blind and the sick, through his flawed disciples, through our youth at Camp Hope, and even through his own family members.

The question then is not about Jesus' occupation. But how do we carry out Christ's work in our own occupations? The question is not about who Jesus' brothers and sisters were, but how is he yours or my brother and sister? What does that mean for me? How do we share the mystery of the Incarnation with the whole human family—yesterday, today and tomorrow?

**AMEN**