

Sermon 8'2'15: The Word Became Flesh (John 1:1-14)

(Michael Fluck, Reader, St Faith's, Havant)

May I speak in the name of the one true God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen†

PART 1 – Introduction

The BBC called it the 'tingle factor'. I wonder if *you've* ever had that experience – you're listening to a piece of music, when suddenly your neck and scalp *tingle* as though they were electrified?

One piece that always does it for me is the sublime '*Pie Jesu*' from Fauré's '*Requiem*'; another is a hymn we'll be singing later this morning - '*There is a Redeemer, Jesus God's own Son*'; and another (I must confess) is Bob Dylan's '*It's all over now baby blue*'(!)

-It's a very *personal* thing. The reaction is completely involuntary, and it's often accompanied by powerful emotion.

And the effect isn't confined to *music* – it can be triggered by **words** [think of Winston Churchill's famous speeches or Martin Luther King's "*I have a dream....*"], particularly when they're spoken rather than read.

One passage in Scripture that's capable of touching many of us in this way is the opening of John's gospel which we've just heard.

It's so *packed full of meaning*, that I'm going to read some of his key sentences again – and I shall *pause* between them –

-I'd like you, if you would please, to close your eyes and relax as you listen – just breathe steadily, listen to John's words, and just let them turn over in your mind during the pauses

So let's begin: []

"In the beginning was the Word....

[]

"And the Word was with God"

[]

"And the Word was God"

[]

.....

"All things [] came into being through him"

[]

"*What* has come into being through him was *life*"

[]

"and the *life* was the light [] of all people"

[]

"He was in the world, and the world came into being *through* him,

yet the world did not know him"

[]

"But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God"

[]

“And the *Word* became flesh and lived among us,[] and we have seen his glory”

PART 2 - the gospels vs John's gospel

The *other* three gospels show *similarities* to each other, but John's is *distinctive*, both in what it *mentions* and what it *leaves out*.

The gospels weren't *written* until at least 30-40 years after Jesus' death - in the meantime the material they're based on (- what Jesus taught, what he did, what happened to him) had been carefully passed on by word of mouth – in those days long before printing, a central part of every Jewish boy's education was learning to *remember* oral material and retell it *accurately*.

But *none* of the gospels is simply intended just as a straightforward *historical record* of events.

Each gospel writer is writing a *commentary* on Jesus for a particular *audience*, preserving / *emphasising* certain things while leaving other things *out* - it's a bit like having four different 'camera angles' on the same scene, emphasising different *facets* of Jesus.

The overall *aim* of each gospel writer is to *strengthen* the *faith* of his target audience, and to *persuade* any *non-believers*.

PART 3 - John's Gospel

John's gospel shows evidence of having been written by a *Jew* from Palestine, who *combined* Jewish thinking with ideas from the *wider* Greek and Roman world.

There are indications that he's writing for both *Jewish* and *non-Jewish Christians* at a time when they were meeting growing intolerance and hostility in the synagogues.

He seems to assume that his readers already *know* the *facts* about Jesus' life.

The writer reveals *himself* as one Jesus' 12 disciples - the one to whom Jesus was particularly close.

And many scholars think John's gospel *was* written (or at least dictated) by John the 'beloved disciple' - who bravely remained with the women at the foot of the cross when Peter and the other men had fled in terror and dismay, and to whom the dying Jesus entrusted the care of his mother Mary.

And there's some indication in the other gospels that John may have actually been Jesus' *cousin* on his mother's side.

John clearly *knew* the *man* Jesus *well* - knew his family, knew the community in which he grew to adulthood, had been *with* Jesus *throughout* his *ministry*, had seen and heard Jesus in *action*.

He had watched Jesus being brutally and humiliatingly killed, and laid in the tomb.

And he'd also encountered the risen Lord after his *resurrection*.

Certainly, John's gospel contains more claims to eye-witness origins than any of the other gospels.

PART 4 – John's amazing assertions

Yet *despite* this (or *because* of this), what *amazing* assertions John makes about Jesus!

John leads us into his book in such a way that by the time we get into the *story* we already know a great deal about what's *coming*, and about what it *means*.

He wants to make sure that his readers appreciate the full meaning of who Jesus *was*, and is, and what he has *accomplished* for us.

While Luke and Matthew's gospels begin with the *birth* of Jesus, and Mark's begins with Jesus' adult *ministry*, John's starts with the *beginning* of the universe!!!

-his opening phrase, '*in the beginning was the Word...*' deliberately calls to mind the opening words of the book of Genesis, "*In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth*"

At the *outset*, John is emphasising that the Jesus whom he and the others have *known* is *not only* a human being like you and me – feeling joy / feeling pain – he also shares *God's own nature*, he's one and the same as the 'Word' of God *through* whom the whole universe + life itself has come into existence! [wow!]

PART 5 – Implications for you and me

What on earth does John mean by '*the Word*', why does he put it like that?

John, writing in Greek [the common language round the E. Mediterranean] uses the term '*logos*', which not only literally means '*word*' BUT also carries the idea of (i) the principle of '*rationality*' which Greek philosophers believed underpins the universe and its workings, and (ii) the Jewish idea of God's self-expression - in the OT God regularly acts by means of his '*word*' – what he says *happens*.

What John is *saying* is: 'this '*Word*' isn't an abstract, impersonal *principle* – it's a person - what's more I've met him, and I'm going to introduce you to him!'(!!!)

John's central theme is this: if you want to know *who* the true God *is* / what God is *like*, you only have to look carefully at Jesus.

The *person* we know as *Jesus* is identical with the *Word* (or principle) who was there from the very start of the universe itself – the *Word* through whom everything came into being.

The *Word* challenged darkness at the very beginning of creation. And it continues to challenge the darkness that sadly *still exists* within creation [think of those news stories from the past week].

BUT despite appearances, the *Word* is bringing into being God's new creation.

But the *world* doesn't *recognise* the *Word* when God sends him – that's the problem that dominates the gospel story.

Moses brought us God's laws, which would make the world a better place if only people could stick to them [think of the ten commandments]. But people couldn't live by them, as the OT shows (and as we see in our own lives).

People *can't manage* it alone – we need the grace and truth that comes through *Jesus* God's Messiah.

What's particularly exciting is the point John makes in v.12 – to anyone who *does* accept Jesus as God's Messiah, to anyone who *believes*, he gives the right to become *God's children*. [That means you and me]

God wants *everyone*, regardless of their background, to be *born in a new way*, born into the family to which all followers of *Jesus* belong by virtue of turning to *him*.

Something can happen to people in *this* life which causes them to become *new* people – either *suddenly*, or more often over a period of *time*.

[Have *we* become new people?.....when? in what ways?.....and if not *why* not?]

Conclusion

Before Christmas, many of us attended an excellent production of a nativity play for adults called '*The Inn Crowd*', in which several people from St Faiths and other churches took part.

And yesterday there was a public meeting to get people involved in the forthcoming *Havant Mystery Play*.

HOWEVER, as John's gospel tells us, there's an even greater drama of *God and the world*, which is in search of actors – and there are parts for all of us (no matter who we are, or what we may have done/ or failed to do) -

- if only we're prepared to accept *God's* invitation and place ourselves in Jesus' hands, saying 'not my will, but thy will be done, O Lord'.

Amen †