

"How a Little Baby Changed Everything"

John 1:1-14

Christmas Eve, 2008

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

John 1:1-14

"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 light, 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. 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."

Prayer.

I've always found it interesting
That the God who created the cosmos
Decided to get some "hands on" experience.
The same God who wove the tapestry of the universe
Willingly chose to make himself wholly dependent upon it.

Life in the womb comes from the mother.
She supplies it all: food, nutrients, protection;
The warmth and love that only a mother can give.
The circle of care is extended at birth,
But only a little bit.
Responsibility rests largely upon the mother.
Men in most cultures like to make a big show of it,
But, in reality, the child looks to the mother for its every need.
The burden of responsibility lay heavily upon Mary,
Here, now, lay the creator and savior of the world.

I find it interesting that God chose Mary:

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A young, inexperienced, adolescent engaged in an arranged marriage.
Mary was poor,
From a modest Nazarene family.
When you have nothing,
Pride is the only substitute.
It is really hard to be proud of the fact
That there was no doctor, no mid-wife, no assistance
Other than the supportive presence of Joseph
(yea, like I'm sure that was real helpful)
And, possibly, the childhood experience of watching animals give birth.
Yet, God took the risk
And allowed himself to be born onto a bed of straw
In a cold, damp cave,
Dug out of the rocks and cobbled together
for the purpose of feeding farm animals.
Think of the obstetrical dangers:
Women die in childbirth.
Babies can be born breach, or with the cord around the neck.
Think about the disease and illness of infancy.
Infant mortality was a significant danger.

Modern wisdom would suggest that God postpone his plans,
For at least two thousand years.
When you consider the history of the universe was on the line,
The one responsible for the future salvation of the world
Had plans to test the waters of the human condition,
Wouldn't it at least be wise to consider
Pre-emptive prenatal care,
A planned C-Section,
At a modern birthing center,
By one of the best obstetricians available?

Yet, God took the risk.

The future was less than certain.
Oh, in hindsight, we speak with certainty about God,
"Of course it turned out that way. Why wouldn't it?"
But when it comes to predicting the future
Of God's intersection with humanity,
We fail miserably.
God's agenda is God's agenda.
Not ours.
God hasn't made a habit of chasing the sticks we call upon him to fetch.
And God isn't likely to change for us now.

The baby Jesus faced danger at every turn.
It began with his birth, but quickly expanded
To when Herod slaughtered all the children
Sending the Holy Family fleeing into Egypt.
Danger waited around every corner for Jesus.
The wrong word,
The disrespectful look,
Bloodthirsty crowds,
A military occupation,
Authorities with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.
God took one heck of a risk.
Humans with free will are about as predictable as the stock market.

Yet, God took the risk.
God took the risk to bridge the gap between heaven and earth
And to, once and for all,
Cement not only a sacred past
But establish an eternal future for every one of his people.
God took the risk of a less than certain outcome
For your behalf, and mine.

I understand that it is hard to believe.
It is hard to believe in anything in today's world.
When human kind is so cruel to one another,
Where greed and excess will trample store employees and steal from Salvation
Army kettles.
I understand that it is hard to believe in Jesus Christ
Given the current status of organized religion
Cover up, hypocrisy, and violence,
Often in the name of a loving god.

But what I'm suggesting this evening
Is that just as God took a risk for you
So too should you take a risk in God
By extending to him your belief.

Belief isn't certainty.
It is not being certain about heaven, the virgin birth, or that Jesus is the Son of
God.
No pastor, priest, or pope is able to speak with certainty.
The only language we know comes from the Word, the Sacrament, and experience.
Neither is belief proof,

Which particularly upsets me, because I, too, am a child of the enlightened scientific era.
My discipline is in mathematics, which demands proof.
I can no more prove to you the divinity of Christ than I can fly to the moon.

Belief in a baby is daring.
It does set you apart from the rest of the crowd, the faceless masses of the dull, the self-interested, the endless consumers of crap.
Belief in a baby does make you cavalier,
A trend setter,
One who is ready and willing to advance faith beyond where it has been
To what it can become.
Belief in a baby named Jesus
Makes one hope filled.
The name Jesus means Savior.
Our hope is that Jesus will save us from the trials and temptations of this earth.
Our hope is that Jesus will save us into eternal glory.
Belief in a baby places our hope in God
And not in anything of this earth
or in our less-than-perfect selves.

Ultimately belief in this divine birth
Means that we are ready to match God's risk even up.
Better than even up.
Give a little to get a lot.
We don't need much; have you seen just how small a mustard seed is?
That's all we need.
A little risk.
A little belief.
That's all the baby Jesus is asking.
Amen.