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United Methodist Church

January 02 2011 **“Incarnational Messiness!”**

By *Rev Rusty Butler*

Scripture: **John 1: 1-18**

I hope and trust you had a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Lynn and I were able to travel back to South Dakota to see her family which is the way we've celebrated Christmas for 30 years now. And it was cold like it almost always is but it is filled with games of Scrabble and homemade soup and looking at pictures and it is home. I hope you all had moments like we had.

But too, you and I know also of families who have lost loved ones during this Holiday season and it must be especially hard. So our hearts go out as a community to Cindy Lowry in the loss of Bob, Leilani and Cindy Watson (one of our preschool teachers) in the loss of David, to Mike Gartner in the loss of his father, and George and Jean Sammeth in the loss of George's mother, and Marty and Eileen Sweeny and the loss of Jaye, Eileen's mother...and to every family who has lost someone dear during what everyone always hopes is a good and happy time.

It casts a somberness over the season and turns this time into something completely different. A time of reflecting and remembering and perhaps even a time of moving forward with a heavier heart.

Would you pray with me?

Oh God, May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts, comfort us, strengthen us and help us move forward in faith. Amen.

I know for so many of us Christmas is a high point in the year. It certainly is for church. We had a cast of hundreds, thousands here celebrating together on Christmas Eve and at the service with the AUMC Orchestra.

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One of my favorite memories of this year will surely be in the Children's service when Schawn was telling the children and their parents about St. Francis...telling them how he went into the middle of the town square after he'd heard the call of Christ and stripping down to nothing and handing over his clothing...I thought maybe one of those kids will hear that and someday do something similar and their parents would say now where in the world did you get that idea...and they would say, "at church!"

I reflected on the Christmas Eve services...we try so hard to have everything just right...all the bulletins and the decorations and the candles...the whole thing. We want it to look so polished so professional...but things happen. In the middle of the sermon at 7:00 I was preaching away...and right in the middle of it...a button must have been punched or hit accidentally and all of a sudden there was this reverberation and huge echo...and I thought...I sound like the voice of God...is anyone else hearing this but me?

Valerie started laughing so hard she could barely hold her candle.

We want things to be perfect but they almost never are, are they? Those things remind us of our less than perfect humanity.

I suspect some of us may want a perfect new year. I hate to break it to you. Some of you saw the psychic's predictions in the Denver Post Sports section yesterday. According to the psychic, it looks like it will be a good year for the Rockies and Troy Tulowitzki, but not so good for Kyle Orton and the Bronco's. Now I'm no psychic, but I think I could have predicted that! Things will be less than perfect. Sports, church services, parenting, teaching, retirement, relationships, religion...well just about everything...less than perfect.

The Greeks knew of a perfect realm where God lived or so they assumed. It was not on Earth. For them God descending to the fleshy depths of Earth was unthinkable.

What the Incarnation means it that we do not escape the mundane to encounter the living God. The earthiness of the story the Word become flesh and dwelling among us...

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That could be exactly what this soaring, poetic, abstract, famous, prologue of the Gospel of John may be all about...

One of the most basic convictions of the church about the character of God is framed here in the prologue of the Gospel of John. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us..."

We have heard that so many times it may not even register on our theological radar screens anymore. But for people 2000 years ago...the idea that God, the one God above and beyond time and space would come in flesh...it would have been unthinkable. There were gods and goddesses yes, but not the one God...in flesh? That was entirely outside the bounds.

first verse of the Gospel of John. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

It is a magnificent opening line and people everywhere have heard it and recognize it. But John's poem doesn't end with that line...no it keeps going...to this line...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

That is called the Incarnation. And it is messy. You see, if you believe in a transcendent God...a God out there ...beyond the stars. A God who sees everything and hears everything and controls everything from beyond this realm. Well to have God living and moving among us. It just wouldn't work.

There are times when we come to the announcement part of the service when Valerie and I just cringe. We think oh my gosh we've got four different people speaking on four different topics and we've got another three or four announcements that we have to make on different things that are going on in the church. It's just a stoppage of the whole flow of worship. What do we do with it. Someone said the announcements are like a bag of peanuts at the opera. A terrible moment wedging its way into an hour of inspiration. Sometimes it feels like that.

The details, the messiness of our church work together.

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Here's what I think about all that. We can try to pin down the Spirit in so many ways...but I think, our human frailties and foibles continue to show us who we really are...and there's something probably very right about that.

Someone once said, "things are going to get worse, and when they do, we have to get better." That's the crux of it isn't it?

But tomorrow we kind of come down to reality...the new year starts, many of us back to work or to figure out the grocery list, or making doctor's appointments. A return to reality.

We don't know what life will bring, so it is what we bring to life that matters.

If you have the opportunity I strongly recommend the King's Speech. In it, Colin Firth plays King George VI who must in spite of a pronounced speech impediment give a speech over the radio to the British Empire in Sept of 1939. It really is a marvelous story about someone dealing with an imperfection...three months later, King George must give another speech, a Christmas speech and in it...the king addressed his people in what some have called the most famous Christmas message of the twentieth century. To end his speech he quoted from an obscure Canadian woman named Minnie Louise Haskins. And this is what he said,

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied, "Go out into the darkness, and put your hand  
Into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer  
Than a known way."