

Colossians 1:15-19
Hello, My Name Is...Immanuel
Rev. Jonathan Cornell
5-10-15

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

This morning, I want to begin by sharing with you a scenario. Because I love the game of baseball and, more importantly, because my mom loves the game of baseball. In fact, this year she took on a side job for the fun of it being an usher at the Minnesota Twins games.

Here's the scenario, a ball player—we'll call him Brian—goes 4 for 4 in a 9 inning game of baseball. You say no big deal, people go 4 for 4 every day. Ok, well Brian doesn't just go 4 for 4, but he hits for the cycle, which for those of you who don't follow baseball, the cycle is four hits in consecutive at bats: a single, a double, a triple, and a home run. Wow, you might say that's quite a feat. But still, this is not a totally unheard of occurrence. So, this is a very believable story. But to take it one step further, not only does Brian go 4 for 4, and hit for the cycle, but he does it with home runs. Let me explain, in this scenario the player, Brian, hits a solo, two run, three run, and grand slam home run. What are the chances of this? I don't know, but they're pretty slim.

This is the kind of story that you might be tempted to chalk up to folklore right? Like Paul Bunyan, or John Henry, remarkable stories that are so amazing that they might just be too good to be true.

But what if I were to tell you that it was true, and I knew it was true because I was there, I witnessed it. It was revealed to me in my experience of it. Then would you believe me? For the record, it really did happen. Still one of the most incredible things I've ever seen.

This is how God's love, God's promises, God's great plan of salvation becomes real to us – through experience. It was revealed to us in a person, Jesus the Messiah. The Scriptures paint a picture of God's story, beginning with a grand cosmic act of creation, followed by an intimate relationship God weaves with humanity in the form of a covenant. Did you know that the picture the Scriptures paint of that cosmic event of creation also depict it as relational? The Gospel of John begins with these words: in the beginning was the Word, and *the Word* was with God. Do you know who John is talking about there? John is talking about Jesus.

Now whether you are a believer in Jesus of Nazareth as Lord or not, what the Scripture says about him is quite stark. He was in the beginning and he was with God and was God.

Later it goes on to say that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The theological term I'm referring to here is the word Incarnation. God takes on flesh and bone, becoming a living, breathing, feeling human being, like you and me.

In the beginning of Matthew's gospel, the angel comes to Mary and says you will have a son and he will be called Immanuel, which means God is with us.

Now today, we are here celebrating the women in our lives. Mary must have felt like a pretty special woman! If I was Mary, I might have been tempted to say, "Next." You women in the room, whether you are mothers or have had significant mothers in your lives, know about big events. This was the biggest. As Christians, we believe that the Incarnation of Jesus, God becoming flesh and blood, is the turning point event in human history. This is the axis. This is the story that brings clarity and understanding to all the confusion around us. And if we will dig into this story, it will make sense and give ultimate purpose to our lives.

The book of Colossians makes it as clear as can be. In Colossians 1:19, it says that **in Jesus Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell**. This Jesus Christ is the one who was in the beginning creating, in whom all things hold together. This Jesus Christ is the one who governs and rules in mercy and in justice. This Jesus Christ is the one in whom the lost and the broken and the down hearted find their peace and their rest. This Jesus Christ is the one before whom all knees shall bow in heaven and on earth...and even under the earth, too.

Does that sound too good to be true? It's not. And let me tell you why it's not too good to be true. Because in Jesus Christ, we meet not only the cosmic Lord, but we also meet a real human being. Here we see one of the most important tensions in the Christian faith: that Jesus is both fully God and a real genuine human man.

Philippians 2 puts it this way: **He, who was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness.**

What the Apostle Paul is saying here to us, in short, is that in Jesus Christ, God lives a real human life.

In fact, this was the very first major controversy of the early church. There was a group of people who believed very strongly that Jesus was divine. What they taught was that his body was only an illusion—he wasn't fully human. They were called the Docetists. And it was at the first church council that was convened at Nicaea in 325 that the church disproved the docetists, saying, "No, the Bible proclaims and we as a church believe that Jesus was fully God and fully human. Jesus was one with the Father in the beginning, through him everything has come into being, and nothing that is made was not also made by him. But Jesus is also fully human, he lived a human life, felt human emotions, experienced real joy and real pain."

There is a reason why he does this. Do you know what it is? Two words: “for us.” Jesus became human SO THAT he might be able to fully redeem humans like you and me. He became one of us to rescue us. In Jesus, God chose to empty himself of all his glory, all his power, all his infinite might and become a real human person, a real boy. And he did that for us. For every single person in this room, no matter how old or young, man or woman, rich or poor, God lived a real human life *for you*.

Now last week, we talked about the Covenant God made with Abram, a covenant to bless him so that he would be a blessing. And the way God made that Covenant suggested that God was the singular participant in that covenant agreement. How we know that we are redeemed is that someone fulfilled the requirements of the covenant, someone gave their life as a substitute. That person is Jesus. But before we get to the *death* of Jesus, it’s good for us to look at the *life* of Jesus. Jesus didn’t just die for you and me; he lived for us as well. And it is good for us to look at what that means for our lives, especially on this Mother’s Day when we give thanks for the women in our lives who, by their example, show us how to live, what it means to be a person, what it looks like to love sacrificially and unconditionally.

And the greatest example we have, that I would argue every mother finds her inspiration, is in the life of Jesus Christ.

There are a couple areas of our lives together where we can find hope and comfort in the knowledge that Jesus lived a real human life. First, God knows what we’re going through, not because God is up in heaven and can look down on us, but God is able to know everything we go through because he himself experienced it in Jesus Christ. There is nothing we can experience, endure, go through, which Jesus himself did not also experience. Every human experience and emotion is fully relatable to Jesus Christ. He knows it, he’s experienced it, and that makes his life tremendously comforting.

How many of you mothers out there have ever received a phone call from a son or daughter late at night because something painful was happening to them? How many of you were the ones making the phone call? Why did you call? Because you knew there was comfort and wisdom in knowing that mom or dad had gone through it, too.

My wife Amy, when she was a freshman at Purdue University, received some traumatic news—she had gotten a B on a midterm. First time ever. And in her broken-heartedness she called her mom, sobbing, telling her that she got a “B”. And through the tears, my mother-in-law spoke these words: “Oh honey, when I was your age I was getting bailed out of jail.” And just like that, a soothing balm of comfort washed over Amy.

How many of you have ever experienced frustration and disappointment? Jesus had friends whom he tried very hard to teach and lead, and they constantly let him down. And he knows what it’s like to be frustrated and disappointed. Have you ever received news that was really disappointing? Have you ever been frustrated because someone let you down? Jesus felt let down and betrayed by his friends. They said they would be and do

one thing and they didn't keep their word, they let him down. Has anyone ever been let down?

Jesus Christ knows what it is like to be betrayed by one of his closest friends. Judas, one who was as near to Jesus as any other, in his moment of need, betrayed him. Have you ever been betrayed by a friend, someone you trusted?

Jesus knows what it is like to experience injustice, both personal and systemic. Jesus knows what it is like to be the victim of a system that treats people unjustly. Has anyone here ever been to the BMV? I have. If you have, then you know what it is like. Have you ever gone through something and it felt like you were completely alone, no one else in the whole world knows what it's like to face what you're facing? Has anyone ever had someone try to say something comforting, like "it's ok, I've been there, I know what it's like" and you think to yourself, "no you don't, you have no idea what it's like"? Jesus knows what you are going through. In fact, as he suffered and died on the cross, he was thinking of every single one of your experiences in which you felt alone, because in that moment he was totally alone. In fact, he cried out from Psalm 22, **my God my God why have you forsaken me?**

In Jesus Christ, there is now no experience that is foreign, that is unknown to God. If you are going through it, he knows it and that is a profoundly comforting truth. There is nothing you can bring before God, into which this truth does not shed light.

The second thing we can see from this picture of God becoming a human being, the incarnation is this: Jesus shows us what it means to be a real human being. Moms teach us a lot of lessons. We can learn a lot from them. But I want to suggest that the things our moms teach us, qualities like compassion, confidence, poise, they learned—in one way or another—from Jesus. If we want to know what a real human being is supposed to look like, we look to Jesus. Jesus is not a fake person.

Do you know what a fake person looks like? Have you ever seen someone who is fake or inauthentic? Someone who cares so much about what others think that he or she will do anything to make others like him or her? Or someone who will do whatever it takes, even stepping on others to get where they want to be? These, I think, are fake people.

If we look to Jesus, we see real humanity. What is that? Kindness. Jesus was kind, not just to the people who it was advantageous for him to be kind to, but those who would have made people look down on him because he was kind to them. Jesus was kind.

Jesus was at ease, he was peaceful. Jesus seemed to always be cool and collected, he was never in a rush, he was always sort of centered, he was present with those who were with him. Jesus doesn't really care what others think of him. His identity is not built upon the opinions of others. Anyone here ever feel like your sense of self depended upon what others feel about you? It's exhausting, right? Jesus has a healthy detachment from what others think of him. He didn't care what the religious leaders thought. He was kind to the

people who others were not. His identity was not always built upon his experience of being around others.

These are just a few qualities that our Lord displayed that help us to see how real and authentic and human he was. And if we will become more fully human, more fully alive, it will not be because we work harder, try harder, pray harder, be more religious in our lives. That is not how Jesus lived as a true human. The way that Jesus was able to live as a fully real, fully alive, fully authentic human being is he trusted his Father. The more we trust God with our lives – fully relying on him, not just when it's convenient, but in the good and the bad, the more we trust – the more we will become the people who we were created to be.

There is one more thing that Jesus is, and this one is the hardest, this one is a little scary. And so instead of frightening you on Mother's Day, we are going to pick up on it next week. It has to do with the question: what happens if I don't do this perfectly? What happens when I'm not obedient? Last week, we talked about the Covenant God made with humanity, and how that Covenant required perfect obedience. What happens when I don't perfectly live as a human? What happens when I'm not faithful? What we'll unpack next week is how Jesus not only lived fully human for us, but also died fully human death in order to reconcile us and renew humanity to a perfect and loving relationship with God.

That's how Jesus lived.