

Suttons Bay Congregational Church
John 1:1-13—No Answers Today

April 20, 2008
Rev. Robin Long

The Word Became Flesh

1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was with God in the beginning.

3Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

6There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. 8He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. 9The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

10He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

A group of preaching instructors interviewed church members about what they look for in sermons. One woman reported that she wants advice on parenting and how to be a good wife. A man in the study reported that he wants solid financial guidance. There were many other study participants who wanted similar kinds of practical, everyday advice. Obviously these folks are coming to church looking for answers and if, by chance, any of you who are here today were interviewed for that study, I suggest you leave right now. I am no Dr. Phil or Suze Orman. I don't have the answers.

This cruel reality of life—that I do not have all the answers—was driven home again this week as I was reading an article in National Geographic about smelters—factories in which aluminum is manufactured—that have been built in Iceland. Iceland's economy is limited and young people living in rural villages often have to leave home to get jobs in the city. Anyway, while young people are flocking to the capital city of Reykjavik, outlying villages with small economies are becoming ghost towns. But, these small enclaves of population are also sitting on a wealth of natural resources—specifically hydroelectric power that Icelandic developers and foreign companies would like to harness to power aluminum plants. One such proposed dam that would power an aluminum plant would “infuse the region with foreign capital, an estimated 400 jobs, and spin-off service industries.” For some people living in Iceland, the smelter seems like their only hope to revive their economy, their towns, and indeed their lives. However, to many, the idea of damming up a river to form a reservoir that flooded 22 square miles of pristine wilderness is revolting and short-sited. The issue is divisive and complex. And I can understand the opinion of an Icelandic school teacher from a rural town who said, “I think the people who are against this are very worried about the land and the reindeer and the birds. But they never want to discuss the needs of the people. Many [of the people who are protesting the plant] live in Reykjavik, and they are against it if we move a stone here but they live in concrete and asphalt. They want to come here in their Jeeps and have a look at the beautiful nature and people too.”¹

And here in lies the problem—the beautiful nature and the beautiful people—which do we choose—what's the right answer? God looked upon the mountains and the flowers and the reindeer and the birds and said—“It is good.” God looked upon the man and the woman and said, “It is good.” It's all good—there's no easy answer here—for people living in remote regions of Iceland or for people living right here in Leelanau County. Nobody's talking about building an aluminum plant up here—but plenty of people are talking about the lack of jobs and the pitiful condition of our economy. Plenty of people are wishing their grown children could find good jobs up here and live closer to home. And yet plenty of people up here are also saying that we already have plenty of people up here and we just can't accommodate anymore if we want to preserve what it is about this place that makes plenty of people want to be up here.

¹ National Geographic, March 2008, 82-83.

Many folks, myself included, call this God's country. Everyday as I drive to work along 643, I am reminded of God's majesty as I consider my surroundings—the sun rising over south Lake Leelanau, the deer munching on grass near the edges of woods, the gaggles of turkeys playing chicken on the road, the twisting collage of vines at Bel Lago Vineyards. On those drives I am convinced that such beauty and synthesis and complexity can only come from God—God is a part of and alive in every bit of it.

1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was with God in the beginning. 3Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4In him was life, and that life was the light of people.

John writes that it is through the Word—the word who was with and was God—it was through the Word that all things were made. Not just people—but all things. And not just things—but all people. And yet the situation here in our growing region and the situation in Iceland and the situation in the Arctic Wildlife Preserve and situations all over the world seem to be telling us that we need to be making a choice between people and nature. In this year's presidential campaign the language is about choices between the environment and the economy.

All life is created by God. God creates life through breath. The word the Old Testament uses for what God breathed into Adam is ru'ah—ru'ah is translated as wind. Greek translates ru'ah as pneuma which means breath—pneuma as in pneumonia. And if you've ever had pneumonia, or an asthma attack, or had the wind knocked out of you when you fell down or were hit—you know that ru'ah, pneuma, breath is sacred and when it leaves you, albeit just temporarily, it's terrifying.

And if we look at the world around us—at God's created world—at the many ways in which the breath is being knocked out of it—it can be terrifying. *5The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.* To read about the thousands of people displaced by floods and drought—to read about children dying of hunger and thirst—to look at a map to see where the rainforests used to be and how much smaller they are now as a result of logging—to look at news footage of blackened, scorched earth, the legacy of some of the worst wildfires in modern history. These are the places in the world where shadows of greed, mismanagement, corruption, and neglect threaten the light that is the breath of God. The life that is the light of people. The life that is our light.

The life force that brought the world into being is of God. The life force that continues to create and sustain in the world is of God. The people in the eastern region of Iceland are of God and the herds of reindeer that were displaced and the trees, flora and fauna that were drowned by a 22 square mile reservoir in that region are also of God. The natural landscapes of Leelanau County that take our breath away are of God. All of this life is of God, all of this is of the Word, all of this is the light that guides the people.

I don't have the answers—reindeer or jobs, owls or loggers, pristine arctic tundra or cheaper gas prices. I don't have the answers and I doubt you do either, but I know that doesn't excuse us from dealing with the questions. It doesn't excuse us from God's directive to be responsible for all parts of creation—even as we wonder what that looks like and how to do it. And even though I don't have answers, I do have hope. I have hope because I know that God is still speaking. I have hope because God has said, "Behold I am doing a new thing." I have hope because scripture tells us that "God's dwelling is with the human race. God will dwell with them and they will be God's people and God will always be with them. God will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away. Behold, I make all things new." Answers—no. Hope—in abundance. And it is with hope and gratitude and humility that I approach this table—and invite you to do the same, this table where we partake of the goodness of God's creation and where we are nourished and sustained to care for it and each other, just as God cares for us.

