

My sister is an excellent preacher. Although we are different in many ways, we also both tend towards procrastination and dislike housework. We joke that if one of us is cleaning, it is a sure sign that we have a sermon to write. So it will not surprise you that at my allotted sermon preparation time yesterday I found myself cleaning a car mat which had suffered from a particularly sticky holiday food event.

As I worked, I contemplated “the Word became flesh and lived among us” and I thought about the distance between such a beautiful and lofty statement and the mundanity of trying to get sticky out of carpet that was already severely impacted by sand. On the one hand we have the Christ, the veryness of God, becoming human in, as it were, a downward arc and on the other we have the daily grind of trying to beat back entropy and make everything more orderly, clean and perhaps more godly – the upward arc of matter moving toward God.

I wondered whether Jesus had to clean stickiness out of carpet – given his era and gender I think it’s unlikely, but for sure Jesus had to contend with the messiness of being human and the gradual decline into disorder that seems to be basic to matter. It is a necessary part of the Word become flesh because that is what it means to be flesh. And to take that a step further, if the Word truly became flesh then the immortal took into its own being the messiness and mortality of matter.

In which case, the downward arc of God becoming human and the attempt at an upward arc made when we pray or worship, clean or create beauty and order are actually one and the same because there is no difference between God and matter.

Some of you know that I took an online preaching class during the week before Christmas. An important step in the suggested process was a “heresy check”.

This is my heresy check. As we think about God becoming matter there is a heresy we can fall into. And that is thinking that if God is matter then everything is God so we end up worshiping matter instead of worshiping God, or thinking that if God is in everyone therefore I am God and what I want is clearly what God wants too.

Some time ago I visited a church. It was not Episcopalian. The worship leader said something like, “What a beautiful day! What an amazing day to be alive! This morning I woke up and I looked in the mirror and I said thank you! I said thank you to... myself!

Yes, God is in me and God is in you because God became flesh and dwelled among us, becoming one not just with humanity but with all flesh. But God is still separate from us. God is both immanent – that is within Creation, and transcendent – that is outside of Creation. The trick is to balance those two things. When we get out of balance we fall into heresy or wrong-headed thinking and we either fail to cherish nature because we think it is not of God or we start to worship it instead of God.

Words have lost some of their meaning in this age of bias and “fake news” but for the Greek thinkers, the Word or the Logos really meant the very core of the cosmos, so we might interpret “And the Word became flesh and lived among us” as “The Life Energy of the Universe, became flesh just like us and camped out amongst us.”

Last week we focused on the baby in the manger – the taking on of flesh. Today we remember the immensity of this event. The Life Energy of the Universe – the great cosmic lord – the great I am – the One who was and is and shall be. That One, became human.

And in so doing, he sanctified matter. He breathed the same oxygen we breathe, he ate the same foods that we eat. He loved as we love – he

fished and swam and played in the same planetary environment that we do.

So that gives the whole of created matter a new purpose, a new holiness - this is the land that Jesus loved, this is the air that Jesus breathed. If we take that seriously then we know that cleaning the sticky carpet is a way that we love God – by caring for every part of creation, even the inanimate parts.

And that includes caring for our bodies. Loving our bodies is also a way to love God. Not in the way I mentioned earlier where church members gave thanks to themselves instead of giving thanks to God, as if they were the ones who created the universe. But loving ourselves in a gentle yet careful way which takes account of our flesh-weakness but enables us to be as whole and healthy as possible. That is part of the practice of stewardship; caring for the whole of God's creation.

Today is our healing service when we ask for God's grace and healing power to touch all the places that are broken in ourselves and in this world. Because of Christ's incarnation, we are not begging some distant God to intervene in creation, we are asking One who knows what it is like to have a hurting body and an aching heart. As we lay on hands and anoint with oil, we are using the symbols of healing as a sign that God's Spirit is truly present - that the cosmic Christ is present here with us and supports our flourishing even in the midst of brokenness.

Then when we gather in Eucharist and receive Christ in the broken bread and the wine, we are once again using symbols taken from Creation to indicate the coming together of the Life Energy of the Universe with matter – the cosmic and the personal intersecting, making new.

It may feel mundane and ordinary because most of us have been here before, many times, but it is far from it. In the oil of healing and the

bread and wine of eucharist we celebrate the continuing incarnation—  
God the Great I Am coming into us – our flesh as well as our spirits –  
God continuing to touch earth with peace and goodwill.

We are the Body of Christ. We are the continuing incarnation. As we  
love, God loves through us. Let us choose to get on board with the great  
redemption project of God so that we can truly say, because we have  
experienced it, that “The Life Energy of the Universe became flesh just  
like us and camps out among us.”