

SERMON
“The Dove Has Landed”
Becky A. Hebert
St. John’s Chapel UCC
January 17, 2010

John 1: 10-18

He [Jesus] 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**. John testified to him and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’” From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and **truth** came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.

SERMON

For some reason the lectionary took one of its detours to John on the Second Sunday after Christmas—which is not today. This is the Second Sunday after Epiphany, but I will be using the scripture lesson from the Second Sunday after Christmas. Why? Because on the Second Sunday after Christmas the family that was going to join the church and have their baby baptized, had to cancel due to the weather. Since I wrote this sermon with that event in mind, it was decided on January 3rd that we would have a very informal gathering (the turnout was small) and save the sermon for today.

When I originally wrote this sermon, I found it interesting that just the Sunday before we had looked at Sophia Wisdom. Then the next Sunday's lectionary asked us to look at Logos Wisdom. So I decided to write a sermon that looks at these two wisdoms together.

First Sophia, the name Luke and others give wisdom, comes from relational knowing versus intellectual knowing. Sophia Wisdom grows out of a relational knowing grounded in love. As Parker Palmer puts it, "The mind motivated by compassion reaches out to know, as the heart reaches out to love. Here, the act of knowing is an act of love, the act of entering and embracing the reality of the other, of allowing the other to enter and embrace our own. In such knowing we know and are known as members of one community, and our knowing becomes a way of reweaving that community's bonds."¹ From this type of knowing comes wisdom personified in Sophia. It is knowledge grounded in the tangible of life, not in some abstract concept conceived from observation.

With Sophia wisdom rested in a subjective way of knowing until the Greek philosophers got hold of it, and turned it into the abstract concept of Logos.

¹ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known: Education As a Spiritual Journey*, p.8.

John approaches the theme of wisdom through the use of this abstract Greek term “Logos,” translated as “The Word.” But John’s use of the term turns the philosophically grounded Greco-Roman world on edge. For John to say that “The Word, The Logos” became flesh and dwelled among us—that “Logos” was loose in the world—flew in the face of everything the Greco-Roman world believed in.

Dualism, separation of “spirit” from “world” or “soul” from “body,” permeated everything that classical pagans believed about reality. Things were more real, Plato said, the higher one ascended, the further one got from the material and the fleshly. Matter was decadent, mortal, and finite: spirit was immortal, pure, and ideal. The whole of Greek philosophy (which was their religion), was to ascend out of the grubbiness of the fleshly into the non-material realm of the spiritual.

The spirit of Christmas, the Incarnation, is about the significance of the infusion of the spiritual into the material—and the undoing of the sickness dualism perpetrates. “The Word” is in the world, no matter what anyone does, this reality cannot be undone. We can attempt to silence “The Word,” even kill him—but the fact that the Logos has taken life in flesh cannot be undone.

Yet, this has not kept us from trying. We fashioned a world split, that I want to believe...is beginning to unravel. We split the world into “spirit” and “matter”—into the grubbiness of the fleshly and the non-material realm of the spiritual. In spite of the incarnation, of the “Word” becoming flesh, Christian eventually owned the Greek dualism as a “divinely created” order of life.

This split of matter and spirit embodied the split between the feminine and the masculine. According to Sue Monk Kidd, author of *The Secret Life of Bees*, “For thousands of years, the

“feminine” has been deeply associated with the body, flesh, sensuality, earth, and nature, while the “masculine” has been associated with spirit, heaven and transcendence over nature. The perception may have arisen from women’s closeness to fertility, procreation, and the rhythms of nature. Through pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing we grow life inside our bodies, deliver life through our bodies, and feed life from our bodies. For these reasons, perhaps, women have represented flesh and embodied the earthly, in doing so we became identified with nature. We speak of Mother Earth and virgin forest.”

“As I contemplated this profound connection,” says Sue Monk Kidd, “once again it became apparent to me which of the two polarities—nature/earth or spirit/heaven—was more valued. Both women and earth have been abused, raped, and disregarded.”²

Let’s go a step further and acknowledge that this split may well be the undoing of us all, not just women. For we have both been inhibited, limited by the dualism of our patriarchal world and not free to soar on the wings of the snow white dove—who has landed on planet earth and gotten his wings dirtied by crawling into the trenches of life with us. And so infused flesh with the divine that there was no way to separate it again, and hence no way to rank one above the other.

“In Christ Jesus, we are all children of God. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”
Galatians 3: 26, 28

I am presently reading and dialoguing with *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, another one of Sue Monk Kidd’s’ books. In this book, Sue tells the story of the time she went to a conference that explored the concepts of Carl Jung. Toward the end of the conference, about fifty women decided to go to the beach to have what they called a full moon celebration. Sue did

² Sue Monk Kidd, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*,” pp.64-65.

not know what possessed her but she joined them. There she found herself winding through the sand dunes, walking by the light of a large moon. As the sound of the ocean swelled in the distance, she found herself wanting to turn back. But they had all come together to the beach in several cars and vans, and so there was nothing to do but trudge forward.

Once on the beach they sang, laughed and told stories—stories of their lives as women. Eventually some of the woman started to dance along the edges of the beach. “Treading into the water, they dipped it up with their hands and tossed it toward the sky, letting it fall around them like wedding rice. Playing and dancing, casting fluid shadows on the beach,” they looked half-real to Sue, “like mermaids who’d swum ashore and found their legs.” Sue, while mesmerized by this, also felt awkward and bewildered. There was no way she could join these women. She could only watch from the edges.

This was one of many points where she realized the feminine in her yearned to be awakened. She says, “I remembered recognizing at the time that I needed to birth a new life, one that had something to do with loving my female self and finding my way back to the deep authenticity of it.” Like, Sue Monk Kidd, I have always thought of myself as an independent woman. I have my career, my own life, ideas and plans. Outwardly I am not submissive. But in reading *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, and through a conversation with my spiritual brother, Chuck Gackstetter, I’m realizing how far I still have to go. I still have so many internalized engendered uneasy feelings that come from a lack of an inner authority—like right now. As a woman I know I should not be talking about feminine things, where so many of my unique ideas reside and lie silenced. I live with a fear of not measuring up to the sanctioned model of who you want me to be, instead of who God calls me to be.

I do not think this is unique to just women. I see the inhibitions you men carry around in your attempts to live up **to the acculturation models** our dualistic society teaches. As Carl Gustav Jung says, “The most terrifying thing is to accept oneself completely.” Oh to let ourselves out of the cages humanity constructs to fly on the wings of a snow white dove—to dance and play in God’s garden of beauty, to dance along the edges of life to the tune of genuineness—well, that scares some of us so bad we get angry. If I asked you right now to get up and dance in the aisles, could you do it? If I insisted you do it, how would you feel?

Thus we are confronted with the Incarnation, not with an idea, not by a philosophical system or a set of principles, but rather by a historical person, on whom the spirit has landed and through whom we can know God.

Today we receive a new family into our midst, a couple will join our church and their daughter will be baptized. Every child given to us is a gift full of potential, if we who will nurture this child can keep the acculturation models from letting the true self blossom. In the receiving of this family into our midst, we embrace the reality of the other. And if we allow them to know us deeply—our knowing becomes a reweaving that bonds them with us in community—a community called to walk with a man, on whom the snow white dove has landed, who will, if we but follow, lead us out from under the burdens the world has imposed and into glories upon glories, full of grace and truth. Amen.