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Pastor Matthew Woods

“Face to Face With Jesus”

Aren't you glad that we can get together with our families again after Covid? Visiting through glass windows, via Zoom, phone calls, etc. is not the same as walking into the room and being in someone's presence. I don't know about you but being together with the people we love and far more interesting than simply talking on the phone or visiting via Zoom. This last week at Thanksgiving it was good to get together with the family in person and have so many of us together in person. Being in one another's presence was fun, encouraging, peaceful, and exactly what most of us needed. And isn't better when we can get a hug from a person when we are in need of one rather than just a simple card or phone call. Cards and phone calls are really nice because they remind us that someone is thinking about us. However, the card or phone call is the bonus to knowing and being with that person. Being in the same room, sharing the same experiences, making memories together, and even causing some mischief is still the best part of Thanksgiving or Christmas.

Being face to face with our Savior is at the heart of Christmas and today's text in John 1:1-5.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Okay, let's set this up with a little Greek. Please bear with me because John 1 has a lot to say about being face to face with Jesus; being in His presence. First, is John's connection to the new creation in Jesus. The original Greek is very revealing. *En Arche* (*ar-kay*), Literally “in beginning” are the same words exactly of Genesis 1:1. John deliberately ties the first creation to Jesus as Creator. Now the Word that became flesh is the source of the new creation. This new creation theme is found in places like Isaiah 65:17-25 which talks of new heavens and a new earth. And 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 which says that anyone in Christ is a new creation. Something new is given in Jesus and it starts with Jesus coming in person.

Next is the very potent word, *en* (*pronounced – ‘ain’*) “was”. The verb is in the imperfect tense. This may not seem like a big deal but an imperfect indicates a continuous state. The imperfect asserts the timelessness of the Word made flesh. The Word made flesh, Who has come, is forever and what He brings in the new creation is forever.

En, (*ain*) is different from another word for *was-egeneto* of verse 3. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. Unlike the *logos*, creation is *egeneto*—meaning it had a beginning. Creation is distinguished from Jesus and created by Jesus who is the *Logos* made flesh. Colossians 1:16-17 tells us, “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.” Jesus enters into His creation to become the sacrifice to redeem it and remake it once more.

Okay now we have the set up. Here's the main event and perhaps my favorite part of John 1, “And the Word was with God.” The word for ‘with’ is *pros*. *Pros- πρὸς*—can also mean “towards” or “face to face” deepening the personification of the *Logos*. *Pros* demonstrates a coexistence with the Father, one equal to the other. It speaks of a unity of nature more than a similarity or likeness which is why the next phrase puts clarification to “with” God and adds “And the Word was God.” *καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος*—Literally—“And (The) God was (*ἦν*-imperfect—always was) the Word.” Bottom line: Jesus is the same stuff of God and He chooses to be with His creation.

The Word made flesh is at the heart of why we celebrate Christmas and Easter. In Jesus we see God face to face. Face to face signals a relationship with the one we are face to face with. The opposite would be to turn our back on someone. That is universally seen as rude and disrespectful.

In the Middle East as well as the Orient, there is great sensitivity to ranking among people. If one is entertaining two guests of equal rank, they must be seated on an equal level. If one were tall and the other short, the latter was seated on pillows so that when he looked at the former their eyes met on an even line. Neither must look down or up to the other. Since they were equal in rank, they must see eye to eye, “face to

face.” (Herschel Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Gospel of John*, Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1968, page 25—Quoted by R. J. Shuta)

We are never going to be equal to Jesus but this is the point. Jesus who is Lord of the universe stoops down in the ultimate humility to meet sinners face to face. Love for the world brought Jesus to us.

The Word became flesh; has an actual face to see. Jesus’ face was kissed by his mother, Mary. Jesus’ face smiled at children. Frowned at the disciples when they fought over who is the greatest. Compassion to the masses. Showed anger as He overturned the money changers tables. Wept at Lazarus’ tomb. Was beaten and punctured by thorns. Was bowed in death on the cross. And was most welcomed after the resurrection. For now, because of our sin we see but as a poor reflection as in a mirror eventually we will see clearly face to face—1 Corinthians 13. Jesus Himself tells Thomas that those of us who believe without being able to see right now will be blessed to see Jesus later, John 20:29. And when we see Jesus for the first time as believers His face will be filled with joy when we arrive in heaven.

And how many other countless faces will we see? Abraham’s, Isaac’s, and Jacob’s. Moses’ and Miriam’s. Rahab’s. Mary the mother of Jesus. Joseph, his step dad. Grandparents, parents, children. People from around the world. Countless faces who hoped as we do in Jesus the Word made flesh. Jesus dwelt among us. When we see Jesus’ face for the first time we will dwell with Him.

Perhaps this is why we Christians like the name, Immanuel—God with us, so much. Add in *the en-was* in the imperfect sense we quickly realize from John that being with God is never ending. All that from a few Greek words in John 1. The best part about the Gospel of Christmas is that it does not change. It is a fixed point for our faith and our hope.

Put all the piece together and we learn that Jesus, the Lord of creation, is the beginning of the new creation. Believers are made new through Jesus elevated into the presence of God our Heavenly Father. It is an everlasting creation that is coming. In this new creation we will see Jesus and all believers face to face. Best of all there will be no end to any of it. This is what is hoped for in this season of Advent. And so, we wait with expectation for the Lord’s return.

May the Lord bless you this Advent season with confidence and hope in Jesus.

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John 3:30