

Tracy Daub
12/24/16--University Presbyterian Church
Isaiah 9:2-7; John 1:1-5, 10-14

SOME SKIN

You know that little warning printed on the side mirrors of cars that states: Objects in mirror are closer than they appear. That's what I think Christmas does for us. Christmas is our annual reminder that God is closer than we think. We need this reminder because sometimes, sometimes with all that goes on in life and in our world it can seem as if God is very far away. But then comes Christmas. And we are reminded that God comes so close, so very, very close to us.

This is what we mean when we talk about the *incarnation*. That word, incarnation, comes from the root word *carnal*, meaning flesh. At Christmas we celebrate that God came to us in the flesh, as a human--a human who wore our human skin, felt our human pain, knew our human struggles, faced our human darkneses.

The short poem I've included in your bulletins highlights the meaning of the incarnation. The poet asks, "God is carnal? Yes! God / has got to be flesh and blood. Bones too/ like any one of us. A child/ can't go to sleep in a dark room/ unless someone is right there beside her./ *Someone with some skin.*

Someone with some skin. With the birth of Jesus, God comes to us in the flesh, with skin and bones and blood, to enter into the dark rooms of our lives and our souls and our world. We are not alone in the dark. God is with us. That's what Emmanuel means.

Christmas is when we are reminded that God's love for us is never abstract. When you think about it, love is never a very useful or meaningful thing in the abstract. In the abstract, the idea of love might seem romantic or sentimental. But the abstract idea of love is empty without

becoming embodied. Love is only truly meaningful when it takes a tangible form--when it becomes en fleshed. Love becomes embodied on those nights when you are up late with a feverish child, feeding her ice chips or putting a cold cloth on his head. Or when you chop the vegetables and cook the chicken and make the soup for the sick neighbor. Or when you care for your elderly parent or ailing spouse by wiping their mouth, brushing their hair, rubbing the lotion on their arms and legs, helping them to the toilet. That's when love takes its form, its shape, its meaning.

God's love is never abstract. Instead, God comes in the flesh because God knows we need someone with some skin beside us in the dark. We don't need an abstract, distant God who only *tells* us we are loved. We need a God who lives that love, shows us that love, embodies that love. We need someone with some skin beside us in the dark.

Because the darkness can be frightening, even to us adults. We have tried to draw upon our own resources to push back the darkness. We have told ourselves that we humans are clever and capable people. We have proclaimed the belief in the progress of humanity to keep getting better and better. We have wanted to believe this. And yet. And yet, the darkness keeps descending. Children are blown apart by bombs. Glaciers continue to melt. People are targeted for their religion. And it becomes harder and harder to believe in the moral progress of humanity.

The darkness creeps into our personal lives as well. We turn to chemical substances to numb our feelings, to technology to escape our boredom, to what we can buy to feel better about ourselves. We lead lives of quiet desperation, unhappy at home, and at work, and with life. Loved ones die, illness strikes, disappointments and losses arise. And we are exhausted from

trying to manage the darkness. And in our moments of honesty, we realize we cannot place our hope in ourselves and our own resources. Like children in the dark, we are lost and afraid.

And into our darkness comes God, in the flesh. The prophet Isaiah offers us his words of hope when he tells us, "those who lived in a land of deep darkness--on them light has shined." Jesus is that light, come to shine in the darkness of our lives and our pain. He comes to offer us hope and to show us the way out.

And the way God leads us out of the dark is with love. Not an abstract love. Not a remote love. This is an up-close kind of love. This is love with some skin. Like any real love, love with some skin, God's love for us comes with sacrifice. Jesus knew hunger. He knew pain. He knew betrayal. He knew grief. And he knew death. Real love is always costly. But God is willing to pay the cost because God knows the power that lies within real love. God is willing to enter the muckiness of our lives and our world because God knows the power that lies in love to heal us, to transform us, and to give us hope.

This is the gift you and I receive from God at Christmas: the gift of God's love. And having received this love ourselves, this powerful, transformative love, God beckons us to live that gift and to share that gift. We can now love this way too.

You know often, we try to construct Christmas as a magical kind of season. With our decorations, and our elegantly wrapped gifts, our beautifully laid tables, and our quest for family harmony and peace, we try to create an atmosphere that elevates Christmas from the ordinary. Look at our sanctuary tonight. This is not ordinary. It's magical and it's dreamy. And there is nothing wrong with trying to create beauty. Only sometimes all this effort to create something magical can trick us into thinking that Christmas is about transcending real life. When in fact, rather than separating us from life's realities and hardships, Christmas is supposed to drive us

further into the muckiness and brokenness of our world with this love we've been given. This costly, powerful, transformative love.

The world needs love with some skin on it. The people in our lives need love with some skin on it. *We* need love with some skin on it. God has answered our cry in the dark. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us."