Sermon 'Word Made Flesh"
Kirk of St James
Sunday January 18, 2026
Rev. Amanda Henderson-Bolton

Imagine you're walking through a bustling city centre, surrounded by noise, distractions, and people busy with their own lives. Suddenly, someone calls out your name. You turn, curious, and see a familiar face—someone you've heard about, maybe even admired from afar, but never truly met. As you approach, a conversation begins that changes your perspective and, perhaps, the direction of your life.

This is much like the scene in John 1:29-42. John the Baptist stands by the Jordan River with his disciples. As Jesus walks by, John proclaims, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" At first, the disciples are simply observers, watching and listening. But when John points to Jesus and identifies Him as someone special, their curiosity is piqued. They decide to follow Him, not fully knowing what they're seeking but aware that something—or Someone—important is in their midst.

Jesus notices them following and turns to ask, "What do you want?" It's a simple but profound question. The disciples respond, "Rabbi, where are you staying?"—not seeking a quick answer, but desiring to spend time, to learn, and to experience His presence. Jesus invites them: "Come, and you will see." Their choice to accept His invitation leads to a personal encounter that transforms their lives.

Have you ever wondered what that must have been like for the disciples? I appreciate John's account of this moment. The disciples are curious about this unknown person; they want to explore the claims that John is making so they simply go with Jesus and spend time in his

presence. I wonder what questions they asked him? I wonder what types of things Jesus talked about that felt so right and so true that Andrew goes and gets his brother and without any hesitation tells him they have found the Messiah. Jesus has not even begun his earthly ministry, there were no major signs and wonders yet, just whatever they heard and talked about that afternoon-- starting a ripple effect of discovery and faith.

We all have moments in our lives where we stand on the precipice of certain decisions and actions that move us forward sometimes in unexpected ways. I wonder as they went to spend time with Jesus if any of them had an inking of how significant this moment would be?

Matthew, Mark and Luke all record the baptism of Jesus differently. Mark, the earliest of the gospels does not include a birth account of Jesus, instead jumping straight from the baptism of Jesus into his ministry. Matthew and Luke both take time to tell us about the birth of Jesus, and then eventually move to his baptism. John on the other hand does things completely differently. Instead of Jesus speaking like in Matthew, or the fuller set of details we read in Mark and Luke, John records a first-person reflection by John the Baptist. Our reading for this morning is the day after the baptism and John is both recording the event and also providing testimony about who Jesus is—John knows without a doubt this is the Messiah people have been waiting for and he wants other people to see the truth.

One of the things that has struck me about John over the last while, that I had never considered before, was his willingness to step aside. Often when people begin to gain a measure of power, they become more and more reluctant to let it go. Some even begin to take measures to try and consolidate and gain more power. John has been so successful in his ministry that

people are leaving the cities to come and hear him preach and be baptized by him. The major leaders in power are hearing so much about him that they travel to see this man and figure out what is going on. Then the moment he sees Jesus, he recognizes him and knows this is the man he has been waiting for, this is the Messiah, and not only is he going to step aside, but he going to send some of his disciples away to be with Jesus. They are not insignificant people; they help form the core of Jesus' own disciple group.

For John, this ministry of his has never been about him—it was about the one who was to come. John never loses sight of that call. He understands the importance of this moment, and he acts as a signpost, not a destination. John wants others to see the signs that he is seeing so that they too might believe in Jesus and understand the truth. The words we read this morning still stand as John's testimony of what he witnessed. What a legacy. "And the word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory."

The fact that Jesus is in the world, that God is manifest in Jesus Christ, is of utmost importance. The incarnation of Jesus—that he took on flesh and lived in this world is a message John wants all people to see and believe. In seminary one of my teachers spoke of how Christians are meant to be signposts in the world pointing toward something greater, pointing toward God, a description I always found helpful. As Christians in the world, we help point the way to something far greater than ourselves.

St Theresa of Avila was a 16th century Spanish Carmelite nun, mystic and reformer whose deep spirituality and writings have had a lasting impact on Christian Thought. She emphasised contemplative prayer, and for people to have a personal transformative relationship with God.

Some of her most famous works were “The Interior Castle” and “The Way of Perfection.” While those books may not sound familiar there is a good chance you have heard one of her more famous poems, “Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, or feet but yours, Yours are the eyes through which to look out Christ’s compassion to the world; yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good; yours are the hands with which he is to bless men (people) now.” I often use a version of this when I do the prayer for the offering—we are the hands and feet of Christ.

What John, and what Theresa point to through their work and writings is the importance of the incarnation—of God becoming flesh, and then how that should shape the lives we live. John wanted people to read his gospel and see the signs and understand the importance of what Jesus being baptized meant for the world. That willingness to enter into the brokenness and pain of humanity and offer hope guided everything else that Jesus did in his ministry and led to the cross.

The other interesting thing is that Jesus does not leave us--as disciples of Christ a complicated set of rules that we must follow perfectly in order to be a good Christian. This account reminds us that encountering Jesus often begins with a simple invitation and a willingness to come, see, and be changed. Just as those disciples took a step from curiosity to connection, each of us is invited to look beyond the busyness and distractions of life, to see Jesus as the incarnation, and to follow where He leads. Not always the easiest road, and one often filled with more questions than answers, but also one that leads to fullness of life, and unending hope.