

The Somebody in All of Us
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A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church
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John 1:1-14

Genesis tells us that in the beginning, the earth was a formless void. It wasn't just that there was nothing, even the nothingness was nothing. It was this clump of matter and space that you couldn't see, or hear, or smell, or feel, or taste. Imagine the most non-descript thing on the planet – a bowl of plain white rice or a container of clear broth; a small office with beige walls, and grey, industrial file cabinets, and particle wood furniture; a strip of duct tape...you pick something. Anything. Even those things at least have shape and feeling. Before creation, we didn't have anything. Nuthin'

But then, then, the wind of God swept across this formless void, and its vast waters, and there was light. Bright, good, beautiful, powerful, life-giving light. And so began the process of creation: sky, land, and sea, separated from one another, filled with light, and eventually life, flying things, and walking things, and swimming things, and plants, and minerals, and vegetables, and eventually humanity. And God called all of it, the thing we're part of now, creation, and God said this creation, as a collective, was and is and will be very good.

I like to read the evangelist, whoever he or she was, because like me, they dig the first chapter of Genesis. They love this mysterious, breathing, creative, ordering God, too. The writer of John believes that something, he or she calls it the word, I like to think of it as energy, or tangible love, or creative DNA, or special sauce if that works for you – whatever you wanna call it – this word is the substance of God.

And somehow, someday, this word, or this substance, or this special sauce, manifested itself in the life of Jesus. In other words, God became human, just like me and you, so that God could better understand us, better love us, help reconcile us with and for our good purposes. This word, the author says, illumined the divine in all creation.

Before this week, each time I read the creation story, I imagined nothing being turned into something. But the more I've read this week, it's made me want to alter that statement. It's not that God created something out of nothing, or that God simply ordered a bunch of bland matter. It's that God made something into the something it was meant to be. God's light animates the world in the same way the sun animates a seed into a plant. God's light was the enzyme that allowed creation to become itself.

The evangelist tells us that the life of Jesus is a similar catalyst. It's not that knowing Jesus turns us nobodies into somebodies. Whether we've met Jesus or not, whether we've explored the truths of a myriad of our world's religions or not, whether we have a command of scriptures or not, whether we've professed our faith or not, whether we're lay or ordained, righteous or unrighteous, introverted or extraverted, seen or unseen, awake or asleep, no matter who we are, WE ARE SOMEBODY.

WE ARE NOT BORN SINNERS. WE ARE NOT FLAWED. WE ARE NOT NOTHING. WE ARE ALL BORN CHILDREN OF GOD. AND THAT STATUS CANNOT TAKE AWAY OUR SOMEBODINESS.

But here's what the life of Jesus does mean for us. Jesus illumines our somebodiness, and allows us to become the somebodies we were meant to be. Now, if you put words in John's mouth, or read its author out of context, you might try to make this an exclusive claim – professing Jesus in the exact way of the Johannine community is the only way to bring out your somebodiness. I think that's lazy, and I think that's wrong.

For those who are sincere, and for those who are earnest, the life of Jesus provides our best understanding of the nature and character of God: God is love, and in the lenses of God's love, we are able to see our somebodiness, and use our somebodiness to fulfill our created purposes. But if we listen to John's gospel, and we listen to Genesis, we also meet a vast and creative God, who has no limits in her love, no limits in her mercy, no limits in her communication. Indeed the same substance John calls Jesus, is also known as Lady Wisdom in Proverbs, and the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Could not the One who separated sky and land and sea, also be creative, humble, and innovative enough to offer divine revelation beyond

the historical events the life of Jesus? If God can transcend our understanding of quantum physics, can't God also transcend our demand for universal truths?

Here's what I'm getting at. The life of Jesus, much like the light that set creation in motion, is a tangible reminder that God is present with us. God lived and dwelled among us. God still lives and dwells among us. And when we open our minds to such a possibility, we discover that we are made of that same substance – we are made of God, empowered by God, to live in, to love, to shape our world. And what did that look like in John's gospel?

A woman is shunned at the well, so she seeks anonymity in the noonday heat; a blind man cannot see, and surely he did something to merit his malady; Nicodemus, a learned clergyman seeks advice in the cover of night. They all meet Jesus: one finds a well that quenches spiritual thirst; one learns to see God; one learns what it means to be born anew. And these somebodies, live into their somebodiness as witnesses of God's truth: one brings an entire Samaritan village to meet Jesus; one regains his sight, not to mention his standing, and offers a prophetic voice; one, despite the danger, ensures the body of Jesus is preserved.

And what of you witnesses? Do you see your somebodiness? And if you see it, will you share it with us? Because whether you know it or it not, your presence, your gifts, your love, your very being matters, and matters inherently. For each of you, can be as Jesus to one another.

Since we've spoken about creation these last few weeks, let me close on a final thought. Elizabeth Johnson encourages us, to think about this idea of Emmanuel – God with us – and especially the “us” part. How big is our “us?”

John's gospel, and indeed all of the others, remind us that God's community transcends race, gender, culture, sexuality, income, or any demographic we create. Because God can and does work through everyone. The life and ministry of Jesus were bent on expressing that truth, and represented a place and time where God was literally birthed into our presence, making us fully aware of our potential and connection. God dwelled with us, ALL of us.

Now imagine how much more powerful this story becomes, if we think about the idea that Jesus didn't just live to reveal God to humanity, but also lived to reveal God to all of creation.

I don't mean to reduce this to the idea that Jesus was some kind of creation whisperer, taming animals and lands to follow his every whim.

But when Jesus met people, he offered comfort, he offered friendship, he offered truth, he offered clarity about the world – he communicated the presence of a loving God. Johnson wonders what happens when we allow ourselves to believe that Jesus' life offered those same qualities to the entire biosphere. How sweet to envision that the endangered, abused, anxious, or worried creatures of our world also find their strength in God's revelation, and their purpose, too. And that they too, may tell the glory of God's handiwork.

Long ago, God came to live with us. Yes humans, but sea, and sky, and land, too, and dogs, and cats, and fish, and bugs, and flowers, and plants, and everything that moves, and has breath, and has being. God told us we were somebody. And such a revelation is powerful.

All these somethings become the somethings they were meant to be: blind men teach others to see; drops of rain become mighty rivers that carve out beautiful canyons, and offer bi-ways and habitats for a diverse set of creatures; seedlings drink up the sun and the water to become majestic trees, offering their shade and their fruit and their beauty; a tiny mustard seed grows into a bush, big enough to be a tree, and opinionated enough to stir up all kinds of ideas.

God lived and dwelled among us. All of us. In order that we might become ALL of us. May that truth, stir us somebodies into the somebodies we are meant to be.

Amen.