

CHRISTMAS DAY

December 25, 2011

Text: John 1:1-14

Theme: "By Flesh Bound and By Flesh Freed"

Well here we are having that schizophrenic Christmas that we have every seven or so years. What do we do with Christmas on a Sunday? On Christmas Day, we are supposed to celebrate Jesus taking on flesh and being born in a stable in Bethlehem, but yet every Sunday is a celebration of Jesus rising from the dead on Easter morning. So what do we do? Many churches around the world go with their normal Christmas schedule today and stick with Christmas for the celebration. Some churches cancel services all together because it's Christmas for heaven's sake and who wants to be sitting in church when there are presents to open and parades to watch? Well here is the official ruling from God. Sunday trumps everything...even Christmas... because without Sunday, who cares about Christmas? If Jesus had not risen from the dead and proven that death cannot hold us either, who cares about his birth? But he did rise from the dead and that is retrospectively what makes his birth so important.

You and I are bound in sinful flesh. We were born into these chains because we inherited original sin from our parents and they from their parents and so forth and so on all the way back to the

Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve chose to eat the forbidden fruit so that they could be like God. Just as a slave is a slave if his parents are slaves so too were we born into this slavery of sin. It has nothing to do with what we have done or what we have failed to do. It is simply our lot in this world. And don't get all haughty and self-righteous. Don't act as though you would have never sinned if it had been you. That's the age-old confirmation class position.

"Why do I have to get punished for what Adam and Eve did? I wasn't the one who ate the forbidden fruit!"

First, you are not being punished for what Adam and Eve did. Jesus was punished for what Adam and Eve did. Yet, we do live within a broken world because of what Adam and Eve did, but you would have done it no differently. We all would have done it...and if we think otherwise, here is a simple test. Stop sinning. I mean the actual sin that you are able to control. Just stop: thought word and deed. You won't do it. No one ever has. It does not take long at all before we start thinking we know better than God. Oh, none of us would be so crass as to say it out loud, but who says we can't live our lives however we want to? Who is God to dictate to us what we can and cannot do, say or think?

Therein lays all our problems. We try to be God. We ignore what he clearly says to us, do what we want, and wonder why things

fall apart. Even when all of our problems stem from the Garden of Eden where we were trying to be like God, we turn right around and try to be God again. We look at our situation, enslaved by sin, and we decide we will free ourselves. Now God has already told us that his gift to us is freedom, but we try to do it on our own anyway. We try all different ways. Some try to live perfect lives and deny themselves every comfort. Some give themselves over to every pleasure in frustration and just hope that hell isn't too bad. There are people who make up teachings about reincarnation where you get to come back and do it all again. Many, especially in developed nations, try intellectualizing faith. They figure that if they can explain it, they can control it. Others attempt to emotionalize faith thinking that you just have to feel strongly enough about sin in order to conquer it. Obviously, I am only touching on some of the many ways, human beings have tried to control, justify, rationalize and absolve sin.

That is why people are so turned off by the church. They come to churches, Christian and otherwise, and hear all types of methods for salvation and all types of explanations for the human condition. They say some words, sing some songs, and go home with no real answers. Some people don't even expect any more than that. They come to do their penance as though sitting on a pew for an hour and

throwing 10 bucks into the plate will appease an angry god. They do their thing and leave, but are generally unfulfilled, empty and guilty.

The reason so many people are disappointed in religion is that they are seeking that which it does not offer or they are following spurious paths created by human beings that will never lead anywhere worthwhile. We have to get to this reality. Flesh is what chained us to sin. The fleshly choices of human beings choosing to sin is what damned us. So, if flesh chained us, only flesh can free us.

The problem is that we cannot produce that flesh to free us. Only absolutely pure and holy flesh, sacrificed in our place will break the chains and we have no ability to create that pure and holy flesh. We can clean up our lives, deny ourselves, and make up inventive excuses for our choices, but finally a rag is a rag. It's like my favorite tea shirt that Dänya hates. I can wash it, iron it and even mend the holes and finally, it is still a ratty old piece of cloth that is really only fit for a dust rag. No matter how we try to dress our sinful flesh up, it is still only fit for damnation.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God..... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

The Word became flesh. The second person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ, took on human flesh in order that there might be flesh holy enough to free us from the chains with which our sinful flesh has ensnared us. Only faith in Christ frees us from sin. By faith, we do not mean intellectual understanding, the devil has that. We mean a deep and abiding relationship with Christ. We mean studying his Word, which is why we have Bible Studies every week all year long. We mean learning about him from the Scriptures which is why we have the hymns that we have and preach the sermons that we preach. We mean literally dining on his body and blood and physically receiving him into our bodies. Over time, this regular reception of Word and Sacrament will strengthen our faith and the stronger our faith is freer we become. The chains of sinful flesh cannot withstand the righteous and holy flesh of Jesus. By flesh, we were bound and by flesh, we are freed.