The Word Became Flesh

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

One of the situation comedies on television this season that has not bombed yet, but is just on the edge is Sanford & Son. And the two littlest guys several weeks ago were talking to the neighbor who was kind of a traditional God fearing red blooded American. And the little guys of course, were very skeptical about the existence of God. And this poor neighbor was doing his best to give all the best answers, and at last of course, the little guy said, "Okay, okay, if he exists what does he look like?" And the neighbor kind of thought for a while and he said, "Well, he's very old and he has a long white beard, dressed in a long white gown." And they kind of sensed that this was an opportunity to get some inside information and they therefore went on and said, "What kind of car does he drive?" And the poor old neighbor thinks for a while and says, "Well, I don't know but if I was him I'd drive a white Lincoln Continental."

And you know, when we are driven into thinking, "I wonder what God is really like?" You do find your mind turning into that kind of thinking, don't you? And yet, you know it's silly, but you kind of think a wee bit in those terms. And down through the centuries that's what has happened loved ones. Man has varied from one extreme of God as a kind of old, indulgent, nodding, distant, man looking down from them from a great distance, varied from that kind of picture of God to the other kind of cruel, tyrannical, unforgiving being that is pictured in the Hindu God Shiva. And down through history man has varied from one in extreme to the other in trying to picture God.

Man has always had the sense to know that there must be somebody as personable as himself to have created the universe with all the order ad design that is in it. But when it came to

picturing what that God was like, he's varied from making the God too transcendent, that is somebody that was too distant, too separated, too much apart from us to somebody who was too imminent, too much part of us, too much in the middle of us. In other words, at times man has pictured God in the way the neighbor did picture him, an old gentleman living in heaven, looking at us from a great distance, and not absolutely sure what's happening to us.

But at other times man has tried to worship even nature itself as the bringer of rain, and the bringer of crops, and the bringer of heat, and light, even worshipped nature in the form of conscience as the bringer of morals, and the one who decides what is the difference between right and wrong. But whatever way we have pictured him there has always been great mystery about it. All of our ideas have been shrouded in uncertainty. One religious leader would say this, another philosopher would say that, one dad would explain it this way to his son, another mum would explain it this way. One myth would describe God this way, another myth would describe him another way, and it all has been shrouded with mystery and uncertainty so that countless millions of us have gone into death not really sure what the person would be like that we'd face on the other side.

Now loved ones, 1981 years ago all that mystery disappeared. 1981 years ago the Son of the Maker of the world, the Son of our God came into our earth as a human being and suddenly all the mystery was cleared away. Suddenly all the questions, "What would God do if he was in this situation," were answered. Suddenly, all the vague philosophical concepts to explain the existence of the one true God were wiped away and settled. Suddenly all the opinions, all the vague generalizations disappeared in the body of a little baby in Bethlehem. Suddenly no man or no woman had to be in doubt about the kind of person they would meet, and the kind of person they would have to give

account to at the end of their lives. Suddenly all the questions were settled about what our God was like, 1981 years ago when God became one of us and we saw in absolute detail the way he would talk to certain people, the way he would walk, the way he would act, the way he thought. That's really the heart of Christmas. That's the meaning of it.

That now we know what God is like. Now none of us need be in any doubt what the person who made us is really like. I think a lot of us respond at that point by saying, "Well, how can you be sure?"

We admit Confucius was a great philosopher, we admit Mohammad was a great religious teacher, we'll admit that Buddha was a great leader, but we've never called them God. Now why do you think it's reasonable to call Jesus God? To regard Jesus as the special unique only begotten Son of our Creator in a way that we are not his sons? Why is it reasonable to call Jesus God, or to believe that obscure pheasant who was born in Bethlehem, and spent all of his life in such a very small area of the world's surface, and talked to so few people, why should we believe that that obscure little pheasant who was a carpenter was really the Son of the Maker of the universe?

Well loved ones, there are all kinds of reasons. He really did talk like God. If you think of it, you know, he really did talk like God. When he was 12-years-old, and his parents found that he was no longer with him on the way home from Jerusalem, they went back to the city and they found him in the temple, and they asked him what he was doing, and he said, "Didn't you know I'd be about my Father's business?" Now his Father's business was carpentry, but he was discussing theological issues with the doctors in the temple. And Mary did not strangely immediately say, "You're a fool." But she just pondered those things in her heart, because obviously this little boy was sufficiently different

from other little guys to make her sense there was something different about him besides what she had observed at the birth. And it went on like that.

He didn't teach like the Pharisees, "Well I think this, Josephus taught this, Moses taught this, but I think that." He taught with authority. He taught with a sense, "This is the way it is." So he talked with the kind of authority that you would expect the maker of the universe to have. Oh, there are other things, you know, if you'd like to look at them. Look at Matthew 16 loved ones, because that's something that makes this man very different from all others. If you just open up to that chapter I'll explain it to you before we look at the verse. It's Matthew 16, every other philosopher or religious teacher sets his teaching up here, says, "Don't look at me look at the teaching."

I think every one of us, we do it ourselves, don't we? We say, "Look, don't look at me I'm not the important thing. It's the truth that's important." That's the way every human being act. Now, this man pointed out that his teaching is not the important thing, it's him that's important. I mean, that is hideous. Either he is an absolute megalomaniac, or this is really true. But, he did treat himself differently loved ones, to the way ordinary human beings treat themselves as authorities.

Now, you have it in Matthew 16:15, "He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'" And he pressed on that, you see. Another person would have said, "Ah, it doesn't matter who I am it's the teaching that's important." But he said, "Who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'" He obviously talked, you know, as if the Creator of the universe was his special Father and he obviously encouraged other people to feel that way about

him, and he put himself above his teaching. And you know, he claimed attributes for himself that only God has. He claimed attributes of eternity for himself that only God has. He talked about seeing himself as seeing God. He said, “If you’ve seen me you’ve seen my Father.” He said, “If you’ve received me you’ve received my Father.”

Now loved ones, this obscure pheasant was born in Bethlehem 1981 years ago, claimed that he was the Son of the Creator of the universe and he talked as if he were. Now that’s the first reason I think why you have to consider the possibility that he was. Because I think the next step is that many of us say, “Well, the psych wards are full of such people.” The psych wards are full of people who are making all kinds of claims like that and the world has been full of gurus down through the centuries who have tried to draw everybody’s attention to them so there’s nothing different about that.

That’s why loved ones, I think you have to examine the claims and you have to determine, “Alright, was this man a liar? Did he know that he was not divine? Did he know that he was not the only begotten Son of the Maker of the universe, but he deliberately deceived all of us in order to lend authority to his teaching?” You have to decide, you know, is that it? Was he a con man who lied to the whole world about himself?

Now, do you see the logical difficulty you get into? Do you see the irrational approach you get into if you believe that? There is not one philosopher in the world who does not say that this Jesus was not the greatest ethical teacher in the world. There’s not one person. Huxley - British cynic that he is, he admitted, “Yes, this was the greatest ethical teacher in the world.” Mohammad, other great teachers will say, “Yes, Jesus is the greatest ethical teacher in the world.”

Loved ones, how can he be the greatest ethical teacher in the world if on the central point of his teaching his own identity he lied? You cannot respect his ethical teaching at all points and then say, "Yeah, but he lied about the central most important point that he taught us." You cannot do it. It's an illogical impossibility. You either have to say, "If he lied about that then all the rest is untrue and does not work in this life," or you have to say, "All the rest is higher than any other man who ever taught us." And therefore, we have to believe if he had such wisdom as that, as produced that kind of ethical teaching, then he must be honest on the central point of his teaching his own identity as the Son of the Maker of the universe.

In other words, it's very hard to believe that he is a liar. Was he a lunatic? Was he a megalomaniac? Was he another Hitler, or another Moon with that unification church? Was he another man who wanted to make himself better than everybody else? Was he in fact, insane? And it's really hard to believe it, isn't it? His life is a pattern of sanity. His life has none of the abnormality or imbalance that schizophrenics would have, or that megalomaniacs would have. In fact, C. S. Lewis you remember, points out that no one has been able to explain how a megalomaniac could produce teaching that is so sublime, and so true, and so profound.

His life just isn't that of a lunatics. And really loved ones, if he is not a lunatic, and he is not a liar, you really have very little left. You have to determine is this man really the Son of God? He is really what he says he is? I think some people will say, "Oh, well he's a legend." But for a legend to have developed you need time. Some people will say, "Ah yeah, what we have in the New Testament is not really Jesus as he existed. That's Jesus touched up with a lot of exaggerations that his leaders added in order to lend authority to their position." But loved ones, for a legend to develop you need time. Time for all the people to die

who were alive during that man's lifetime. Otherwise, if you begin to write exaggerations about him they just begin to contradict those exaggerations and say, "It's not true. We were alive then."

Now of course, the time was not available. There is not a great gap of time between the time that Jesus lived and the first writings we have about him. Galatians was written in 48 AD. That's 18 years after Jesus died. There must have been many eyewitnesses alive who knew Jesus who read these accounts of his life and could simply say they're true or they're untrue. Loved ones, really all you're left with is that this man really was the Son of the Maker of the universe, that that's really who he was. And you know, even his claims, and his talk, you can get away with claims or talk even though we examine them this way analytically. But what you can't get away from is his acts. He really did have power over nature, and over sickness, and disease.

He fed 5,000 people with a few loaves and fishes. He stilled a raging storm. He made water into wine. He raised the widow's son. He raised the centurion's daughter. He raised Lazarus from the dead. He obviously had the kind of powers over the world that you would expect the one who had made the world to have. So, his power of sickness, and over nature and disease is consistent with his claims that he is in fact, the one by whom all these things were made. It certainly dealt with the things around us as if he had made them. And then you know, if you examine his own character, there is just no life that has been lived like his.

Ah, somebody puts it this way, a man called Muggeridge tries to summarize it and points out that there has been no human being who has ever been as perfect as this man Jesus. He just is above everybody. Mohammad's life was torn with acts of vengeance, and fights, and strife. Old Confucius admitted that

he had many faults. This man Jesus actually stood in front of a group of people and said, “Which of you convicts me of sin?” And nobody pointed sin out in his life, nobody said anything.

The great saints, and sages, and mystics will all admit that the deeper we have gone the more conscious we are of our own sin, the more conscious we are of moral failure. Loved ones, he had no sense of moral failure. But not only that but the people that lived closest to him agreed with that. People like Peter and John said, “Listen, there is no sin in him.” Even the centurion who was his enemy who crucified him said, “This surely was the Son of God.” Even Pontus Pilate whose job was to find out something wrong in order to get rid of him said, “Behold I find no fault in this man.”

So loved ones, his own life and his claims to sinlessness were backed up and reinforced by other people. And here is the way Muggeridge has described it. “His zeal never degenerated into passion nor his consistency into obstinacy, nor his benevolence into weakness, nor his tenderness into sentimentality. His unworldliness was free from indifference and unsocialability or undue familiarity. His self-denial from moroseness. His temperance was free from austerity. He combined childlike innocence with manly strength absorbing devotion to God with untiring interest in the welfare of man. Tender love to the sinner with uncompromising severity against sin commanding dignity with winning humility. Fearless courage with wise caution. Unyielding firmness with sweet gentleness.” It’s the kind of human character you would try to imagine if you were trying to create a perfect being, and that’s what this man Jesus, this obscure pheasant who was born in Bethlehem was like.

Finally, maybe the most powerful thing is of course that many through controlled breathing while apparently being buried alive have claimed to come alive again after being dead. There have

been many con men who have done that kind of thing. There are gurus and mystics in India today who can give an appearance of having been dead and having come to life. Their fame of course never gets far beyond the boundaries of their own village and if it ever comes to light in the world as a whole, their claims are very quickly exposed by just a little bit of analysis and a little bit of confirmation from eye witnesses.

But loved ones, this man continually repeated that he would be crucified and that on the third day he would rise from the dead, and he did it. And there is no historic incident that is so reliably documented as this resurrection of this man Jesus. No historical incident has been so analyzed from a literary, and historical, and legal point of view as has his resurrection from the dead. No two facts have been so often questioned and so often subjected to detailed criticism, and discussion, and debate as have the twin facts of the empty tomb and the resurrection appearances. And after all that, over 1900 years the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is still the most solid historical incident that we have available to us from first 500 years, 1000 years of our era.

Loved ones, it doesn't matter what way you turn on that one, you cannot get any other answer except the resurrection is a far easier explanation of the whole event then all the explanations we can suggest or substitute for it. You try to go that swoon theory, it falls to the ground. It's ridiculous to believe that he could have swooned and then could have come alive so tremendously and powerfully alive after bleeding in a dang cold tomb for several nights, and then come so alive that he convinced his followers and 500 people at one time that he was more alive than he had ever been before. And was able not only to come alive but to appear in different places at great distances from one another.

It's just foolishness when you start arguing the Romans stole the body. If they stole the body all they had to do was produce it to kill the Christian witness once and for all. If the disciples stole the body then you had to have them dying for something they knew to be a lie which is an ethical impossibility. People will die for what they think is true but they will not die for what they know to be a lie. They will not lead their children into crucifixion for what they know to be a lie. It doesn't matter which way you go loved ones, you have to accept finally that the only explanation of the resurrection is the resurrection. You can't argue they went to the wrong tomb, how did they all keep going to the wrong tomb day, after day, after day.

You go to the resurrection appearances and you try to apply the psychological laws of hallucinations to them and it doesn't work. A hallucination must be subjective. He was seen by about 500 brethren at one time and by groups of people in the upper room. Hallucinations have to be seen by people who want to see them. On the road to Emmaus you remember, the two men said, "And we thought that this was he who should have redeemed Israel." They had given up hope of him coming alive again. They had no hope of him coming alive. They felt that bit doesn't come true. Hallucinations have to appear over a long, long period of time. His appearances took place over 40 days and then they disappeared completely. You just cannot explain away the appearances on the ground of hallucinations. The psychological laws are not similar.

Loved ones, it doesn't matter how you go on this little pheasant who was born in Bethlehem 1981 years ago, you're driven to the conclusion that this was really our God come here in a human body and that if we want to know what our God is like you just look at this man Jesus and he is God. And loved ones, that's it really. The final proof of the existence of God is this little baby that was born 1981 years ago in Bethlehem and that's really

what it means that the word became flesh, and that's how we come to believe in God. And the amazing thing is that your friends and relatives, and your colleagues at work, and my colleagues and friends will only come to believe that there is a God if the word again becomes flesh in your life. That's it.

Unless God sends the Spirit of his Son into your heart so that your life reflects the beauty of this life, your friends and colleagues are hearing words, words, words, and talk they know is cheap and they listen to it day in and day out. Loved ones, unless the word becomes flesh in you all you give to your friends and your relatives is talk. And of course, what God wants this Christmas is for his Son to be born in you in a fuller way. There isn't one of us loved ones, there isn't one of us here who does not need Jesus more alive in us this coming year than he was last year. You cannot live on the degree to which he was alive in you last year this next year. God requires that you allow his Son to be fully formed in you in a fuller and more complete way. The only way it can happen is if the Holy Spirit conceives this Jesus in you as he conceived him in Mary. And if you say to me, "Well, what do we do?" Loved ones, there's just one condition, you say what Mary said, "Be it unto me according to thy word."

You say to God this morning, "Lord God, I do want my relatives, I do want my friends, I do want my colleagues to have the same opportunity of seeing that there is a God like you as I have had. So Lord, look at my life, will you change it as you want and I'm willing for you to change it, and I'm willing to change it myself as you want so that Jesus can be born in me." Now loved ones, look the problem is they see you. That's it. They see you and me with all our inconsistencies, and all our bluff, and all our hypocrisy, and all our dishonesty, they see us and they hear us talking this big talk about God and how we're Christians, and how we believe in God and love ones, they are no more fools than we are.

They just say, “Haw-hum,” and they’re polite to you, you know they’re nice to you and you’re their friend and they don’t want to break up a friendship so they’re polite to you. but loved ones, they will not believe until they see your life like Jesus’ life. And the only way that will take place is if you say to him, “Be it unto me Lord, according to your word. Whatever you want to do with my life Lord, here it is do it. However you want to change it, you want me to stop being dishonest in business Lord, that’s it I’ve finished with that. Jesus come in and be your own honest self in my business life. You want me to stop being dishonest and lying at school in order to establish my reputation? Lord, I’m finished with it. You come in and be your own honest pure self so that they can see God. You want me to stop sidestepping on income tax? Alright Lord, I’ll stop it. You come in and be your own honest self.”

Loved ones, the world is dying for a side of Jesus and each one of us here in this auditorium is able to give them that side. But it does mean that you have to be willing for Jesus to come in and be himself in you and let him change your life. I really just pray – I really – well, the words aren’t strong enough you know. I cannot tell you how strongly I pray and wish that you would let Jesus be formed in you. Really. And just let your life be run and ruled by God the way he wants so that Jesus could appear in you. That’s what the miserable old word needs, you know. Let’s pray.

Dear Father, we know this in our hearts but Lord, somehow Satan or somebody has deceived us into thinking that well, we can never be a carrier of Jesus. So Lord, many of us have settled for less, settled for doing our best. Lord, we recognize that doing our best has given us an escape, we’ve been able just to do as much as we wanted, but Lord, we see that it’s just a hypocritical mess and our friends, and our colleagues at work

and at school have failed to believe in God because they can't believe in us because they know our Father, that if we really believed that Jesus was you we would let him live in our lives and take over our lives. We'd change our ways.

Father, we would ask you as we come to the end of this year to show us what it means for us to say, "Be it unto me according to your word." And Lord, we would ask that during this Christmas week you would show us what it means or us to have Jesus born in us. Lord, we want our friends, and our colleagues, and our relatives to be able to see him clearly, no longer shrouded with our miserable halfhearted lives but see him clear, and clean, and pure, and plain. So Lord Jesus, we want to deal with you this week and we want to ask you on Christmas morning to be born in us and Lord, we are willing on that day to let all the miserable coating of dishonesty, and lying, and hypocrisy, and selfishness fall away from us so that you can be seen as you really are in all your beauty. And a word may become flesh in our lives for your Glory. Amen.