

SERMON
ADVENT/CHRISTMAS SERMON SERIES: PREPARE YE
“Moved into the Neighborhood”
John 1:1-14
Sunday, December 27, 2020

August 24, 2006. That’s when it all happened. That’s when things went south. That’s when the bottom dropped out. That’s when everything became completely undone. August 24, 2006.

On March 13, 1930, things had begun with so much excitement. There was fanfare. There were fireworks. And there was a great flourish of excitement! And it was global. It really was. But that was on March 13, 1930—the day Clyde Tombaugh discovered it.

On August 24, 2006, though, it all came crashing down. On that day the International Astronomical Union, meeting in Prague in the Czech Republic, voted to downgrade the planet Pluto. To what? To a dwarf planet!

The audacity of it all!

How could they? Pluto was no longer Pluto! The International Astronomical Union now officially calls Pluto “asteroid #134340.” That’s right. Pluto got bumped. Pluto got cut from the team. Voted off the island. Hosed. Rejected. Demoted. Devalued. Demeaned. Dismissed. One day Pluto’s in. The next day Pluto’s out. This was such a stunning turn of events that in 2006 the word of the year was what? Plutoed!

Pluto, the proper noun, became Pluto the verb—plutoed. Plutoed? We all know what that feels like. We were the wrong size, the wrong height, the wrong shape, the wrong color, the wrong age. We had the wrong friends and went to the wrong school. And we had the wrong parents. People get plutoed by bosses, businesses, boyfriends and all kinds of busybodies.

In our scripture reading for this morning John proclaims “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Another way of saying it; is that the Word, became incarnate. Reed Lessing of Creative Communications for the Parish reminds us that the word ‘dwelt’ literally means to ‘pitch a tent.’ Lessing says of its meaning: *“It’s an Old Testament idea. Moses built the tabernacle—a tent—so God could dwell with Israel. Solomon followed Moses. He built a temple so God could dwell with Israel. The Message Bible doesn’t use the word dwelt but rather ‘moved into the neighborhood.’ By living in Moses’ tabernacle and in Solomon’s temple God moved into Israel’s neighborhood. And now God, through the birth of His Son, has moved into our neighborhood.”*

Throughout his Gospel, John describes just what that neighborhood looked like:

- A Samaritan woman, who had been divorced five times.
- A paralytic, who had been crippled for thirty-eight years.
- Five thousand men—along with their wives and children—who were famished.
- Mary and Martha, whose brother Lazarus had died.
- A man born blind.
- Discouraged disciples.
- Sheep without a shepherd.

The Word become flesh. And he did it for plutoed people.

A couple of weeks before Christmas, an elderly man in Phoenix telephoned his adult son in New York. He said, “Son, your mother and I have been married for 40 years, and I just wanted to call and tell you that we’ve decided to get a divorce.”

His son was aghast. He said, “Dad, that’s terrible! Don’t you and Mother do a thing until I’ve had a chance to come and talk to you. I’ll be on the next plane to Phoenix!”

They hung up, and the son called his sister in Chicago. He said, “Sis, Dad just called. He told me that he and Mom are getting a divorce.”

His sister said, “Like heck they are! I’ll meet you in Phoenix, and we’ll talk some sense into them.”

She hung up and immediately telephoned her father. She said, “Dad, brother just called me and told me that, after 40 years of marriage, you and Mom have decided to get a divorce. Don’t you do a thing until I’ve had a chance to talk with you. I’ll be on the next plane to Phoenix.”

Her father hung up, turned to his wife, and said, “Honey, both kids are going to be home for Christmas, and they’re paying their own way!”

John's Gospel is adamant: On Christmas we are not the ones who are doing the traveling; God is. We are not the ones who are paying for it; God is. We are not going to his neighborhood; He's coming to our neighborhood. Reed Lessing says that God has entered our neighborhood *"on the floor of a stable, through the womb of a teenager, in the presence of a carpenter from Nazareth."*

We all know this neighborhood too well. It's the neighborhood, says Reed Lessing where *"some are worried sick about their financial condition. Others are struggling with health, or the health of a loved one — wondering if this might be their last Christmas. Some are wrestling with old hurts that won't heal or new wounds that still sting. Still others are missing loved ones — perhaps because of distance or death, or due to cruel, insidious design."*

And the even more amazing thing about the incarnation is that Jesus didn't just show up for the birth only to quickly retreat back to his glory in heaven; no, he stayed to teach, heal, love, forgive, bleed, suffer and die.

Jesus moved to the neighborhood to get plutoed.

Athanasius, an early theologian of the church once said of the incarnation; *"The Lord did not come to make a display ... [God came] to put himself at the disposal of those who needed him and to be manifested according as they could bear it."*

This truly is what Christmas is all about is it not? God moving into our neighborhood in such a way that we could best understand His love for us? Not just the high and mighty. Not just the kings and queens. Not just the polished, the preppy, the preferred, the pretty and the powerful. But him, her, them, you, me, us!

This is why I find myself every Christmas singing as the angels sang: *"Mild he lays his glory by, born that man no more may die, born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth. Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"*