

Let us pray... Eternal God, gather your Spirit in this place. Open our hearts and minds so we may find you in all that we do. Guide our journey together, with you at the center. Amen.

If you ever worked as a server, or in a grocery store, or with people in general, you know how people can be sometimes.

After working in a restaurant for many years, I have shed my fair share of tears, and I have embraced others in their tears, while they shared the disrespect they had endured...

Words can truly hurt... They can be used to manipulate, wound, coerce, and they can cause extensive psychological damage and trauma.

And at the same time, the opposite is also true... Words can be used to lift someone up, to encourage, and to express love, grace, and kindness.

And there was a time when words were so powerful, God used them to bring life into existence...

As we hear in Genesis, God spoke and said let there be light, and there was light...And so on and so forth.

And God's word continues to show up throughout Scripture... God speaks through the burning bush, through the prophets, and so many more.

And then we get to the Gospel of John... And God's word becomes flesh...

As we hear echoing throughout John chapter 1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and lived among us."

In fact, the first 18 verses of John are about the word becoming flesh.

That's a lot of verses, which means something important is going on here, and the word becoming flesh, is something we need to pay attention to.

Especially when things start to get weird... Like they do in chapter 2.

A passage that seems to be about selling things in the temple...

However, this is not the point.

Because the temple was meant to function as a marketplace. That was how it was set up, so people could buy the things they needed for making a sacrifice to God...

And they could also buy things, which profits would help support and maintain the temple.

And the temple was an important place during that time, because people believed this was God's only dwelling place.

But this is no longer the case... As the incarnation has changed everything. Remember... The Word became flesh and lived among us...

This is Jesus' showing us what it looks like to live into the theology of John chapter 1. He is saying I am here, God is here, in the flesh, not just in a temple.

He is not saying that the temple is bad, nor are our places of worship bad...

Because places of worship are where we come to learn more about God... Where we create community... Where we are invited to Christ's table... And where we leave knowing God is with us.

And we know God is with us, because of Christ... In Christ God's Spirit has been unleashed into creation... Into the flesh, which means that God's Spirit now takes up space in our hearts.

Because the incarnation has everything to do with God becoming flesh... And by becoming flesh, Jesus will die, just like all life.

A heartbreaking reality we live with every day... Some days more than others...

And this season of Lent magnifies this somber reflection...

It's 40 days of being reminded of our journey to the cross, of our own mortality, and how fleeting life is. Which is why we start Lent with Ash Wednesday.

When we receive the mark of ashes and we bear it on our bodies... A mark that is not so easy to wipe off.

Those ashes leave a trace, they are a mess, and if you just barely touch it, the ash will smudge, transfer to your hand, and then to the next thing you touch.

The messiness of the ashes are a reminder of how pain and death linger in our daily lives.

Their sticky residue reminds us that we don't simply get over things and move on without working on them...

And they remind us that we need to pay attention to where our ashes are showing up, because if we don't, we are going to pass our ashes all over the place.

By smearing our ashes on others through our open wounds and sharing our pain and suffering in ways that hurt others.

This is why Jesus was so upset.

Since God dwells with us, how we treat others matter.

Jesus is using the example of the market place and saying, it is not okay to treat people like a commodity, treating them like something you would buy in a marketplace.

As author John Green writes, "People were created to be loved. Things were created to be used. The reason the world is in chaos, is because things are being loved and people are being used."

This is what upset Jesus. And this is what Jesus is calling us to pay attention to... The words we use, and how we use them toward others matter.

Because the Word of God has changed everything. And it is not just how we treat others, it is how we live together in community, and how we treat ourselves...

You bear God's beautiful image, and God works great things in you... Even on the days when you are exhausted, on the days you are in pain, God is at work in you.

You may not always be able to feel it. You may not always be able to believe it. But God is there.

Which is why we have each other. Together we make up the body of Christ, something you can lean into. Something you can see. Someone you can talk to, and remember that Christ is with us... Amen.