



Series: Animate	Reference: John 1:14 & various passages	Title: Flesh & Blood	Date: 10.15 .17
Website Writeup:			
We continue our study in spiritual formation putting flesh and blood to our experience with Christ through His Scriptures. If you did not hear last weeks sermon, start there before this one.			

Color changes in text indicate slide changes

-SLIDE PERSON: PLEASE RECORD THE SERMON-

(Thanks to Greg Boyd & Woodland Hills Church, we've used many of his words, ideas, and the Animate booklet from their series by the same name - in all the Animate series there are just too many of Greg's words to footnote - thank you Greg! Imitation is flattery brother!)

We're speaking of being transformed by Truth, finding freedom & experiencing Jesus as a concrete reality within an Inner Sanctum. (Reminder: Animate booklets). Today we go further in putting flesh & bones to spiritual formation. John 1:14... *¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory....*

God made flesh in Jesus, the Incarnation. John wasn't theorizing about Jesus' glory - he saw it. Jesus was a concrete experience for him. If John felt spiritually dry all he had to do is recall images, experiences, words & feelings of Jesus. We spoke of contemplation last week, the ability to image truth & how that transforms us. Richard Foster in his book, *Prayer; Finding the Hearts True Home*, writes this, "To believe that God can sanctify & utilize the imagination is simply to take seriously the Christian idea of incarnation." God's Living Word embodied in our flesh. *Let's begin with a poem by Terri Churchill called Words...*

I've been trying to reach you
climbing a tower of words
babbling words -
dead ink -

my heart cannot speak this language,
so it smiles politely and nods its head,
and pretends to understand.

but your words are not like this.
you opened your mouth
and creation said 'yes'
and appeared from nothing -

day and night
oceans and land
and me-
all this with a few words



I want to hear you this way.

I want to hear you in
flesh and blood
and blinding colors
and music that carries me to you.

can you carve your meaning
into my heart?
will you say to the motionless ink
'rise and walk'?

Climbing a tower of words doesn't get us to God - that's building our tower of Babel all over again. It's not the language our hearts speak; information's dead ink on a page until it's incarnated in you.

Here are some familiar words... *'God so loved the world that he gave his one & only son'*. If they remain only words they have no power. We've studied these words, but until they become real they're not what your heart speaks. You'll go through church motions, nod & pretend, knowing when to bow, clap & say amen - but it hasn't been made flesh. We need words full of color & music which carry us to Jesus, words which paint a picture in us & become reality.

You remember the words of this story. She's about to be stoned to death because the law says she must; the adulterous woman. They bring her to Jesus, the only sinless man who actually has the right to judge & stone her. But he doesn't, he treats her with compassion. Stands in the gap for her. And the secret is we're all that woman as well as those men at the same time, none of us without sin - all stand guilty before God deserving death! But Jesus stands in the gap for you. I bet her experience of Jesus is real - he touched her, forgave her, stood in the gap for her - he reached down & lifted her up. Art can enflesh truth, it helps you imagine the story & puts bones & skin on it.

'You're forgiven' could be just dead ink on paper. How many of us have studied & taught those words, yet still walk through life feeling condemned? Words which haven't been incarnated - made flesh in us. I'm not talking salvation, but sanctification which should bring freedom & transformation. Salvation isn't dependent on practicing faith perfectly - you can be a Christian & still walk around feeling condemned your whole life, but it doesn't mean it's true of you. We need words full of color which paint a picture in us & become reality, words becoming a song which carry us to Jesus. Words like this...

You may've seen this painting. Jesus, holding a man up. But the man's holding the hammer & spikes used to crucify Jesus. His sin, like all of ours, drove those nails into Jesus' flesh & bone. But Jesus holds us up & says I forgive you - it's not just information which impacts us, but reality, flesh & blood, touch; when that information, that truth becomes real to me. *And when God speaks, reality occurs...you opened your mouth & creation said 'yes' & appeared from nothing - day & night, oceans & land & me... And*



birds. And cats. And trees. And lakes. And my kids. And freedom. When God speaks things happen, and that's not just about initial creation, it's now. Hebrews 1:3 says, *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.*

Jesus sustains in the continuous tense. We're sustained in flesh & blood existence, our reality held together by the power of Jesus' word. That word was best expressed on the cross & this means that we're held up by perfect unsurpassable love even now. That breath you just took was a gift of God & God sustains concrete tangible experiential truth - you. He creates this concrete truth & loves it.

That's the opposite view of the ancient Greeks. They didn't value concrete tangible reality. They saw it as imperfect, unreal, or evil & believed God would have nothing to do with the material world. So they put abstract truth above concrete material truth. For Plato, math was the highest form of knowledge, because it was the farthest removed from the material world; it was abstract. They divorced the mind from the heart, looking down on emotion & heart, and up to reason & mind. They thought the heart & emotions too influenced by the physical world. Therefore, the heart was inferior to the mind. God wasn't interested in involving himself with anything physical or concrete for the Greek so he was divorced from it. God was above having emotion, or being impacted by anything in this world.

This had an unfortunate impact on theology in the formation of early Christianity since God would be described as an abstract principle; above, detached from emotion, abstract, unknowable, far & separated by a sea of holiness. But the God of the Bible loves creation, created it, spoke it into being & interacts with it. He speaks in the context of relationship, not in abstract theological principles. He's impacted by what goes on & has emotion about creation & people. We impact him, he impacts us. He uses vivid metaphors to communicate himself; the Groom, Good Shepherd, Lion, Lamb, Father, Son, etc.. Not abstractions, but pictures to relate to, things we know. He gives dreams & visions to Prophets who saw through imagination. The whole story culminates with this very unique God becoming flesh & bone in Jesus - *The Word became flesh & made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory...*

God became tangible, concrete, human, incarnate. And John can't get over it. In 1 John 1:1-3 he writes...*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*

Okay John we get it! You saw him, you touched him! But John's words are so far removed from Greek Abstraction he's got to be overkill in his description - God becoming flesh was unheard of in Greek thought. John had to be clear - God's real,



tangible, we *can* have fellowship with him - we've touched him. Even after Jesus is resurrected, his body's transformed for sure, but it's still tangible - he ate broiled fish, Thomas stuck his finger in his side! In Luke 24 the disciples are talking & the resurrected Jesus shows up & they're frightened. He says, "*Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.*" (Lk 24:38-39) Then he asked for something to eat! Impersonal abstractions don't ask for something to eat!

God's not a far-removed principle, he's in love with this physical world. He's a part of it, made it & sustains it. We're made in His image, with a godly impulse to be transformed by concrete divine experience. Greeks had it wrong - the heart & mind aren't two separate things. We think with concrete experiential images & emotion. We think by replicating concrete experiences in our mind, with all five senses involved; seeing, smelling, tasting, touching & hearing.

When I think of my wife, I don't think with a ticker-tape of data running through my brain of just information. I get an image of her, how she smells, looks & makes me feel. I recall her kiss, the taste of her lips & smell of her hair. It's not abstract information - she's real to me. The same set of neurons in my brain are activated whether she's next to me or not. She doesn't have to be there for me to experience her.

If you ask me about Kim I give you information. You can't experience my experience of her. We think with concrete images with neurons firing away at 1/3000th of a second. There's so many images firing away in our minds our mouths can't convey them. What comes out of our mouths is nowhere near the experience going on in our minds. If I say *Krispy Kreme Donuts*, you have an emotional experience different than someone else. The information we give another person is always abstract information - one step or more removed from the actual experience.

We can't grab someones hand like John Coffey did in *The Green Mile* & merely transfer experiences. We think with concrete images & re-image something we've experienced. All experiences have emotion attached to them; the heart & mind together. The more concrete an image is, the more power it has over our lives. Think about how much time you spend feeding your mind images & experiences - watching football, *Netflix*, reading trashy fiction novels. Now think on how much time we spend contemplating Jesus. No wonder we feel dry.

When I'm away from my wife, I'm moved to emotion by her. The image of her enjoying a sunny day in her garden, smiling, talking to her plants - I feel something. In Advertising, some commercials have no words at all, or words you can't even understand like the Fiat Abarth commercial. It doesn't matter, advertisers speak with concrete imagery. Some legally have to communicate words, like drug adds, with their long litany of things this drug could do to you...but you don't remember that! They capture your attention with imagery - you watch the little cartoon robe follow the lady around signifying her depression. The image matters, its why sex sells. It's easiest for people to imagine sexual



imagery so even products which have nothing to do with sex are associated with it. Like your computer storing cookies, images get planted in our brain.

We don't just get information about things in the past, we re-experience, re-imagine, feel & see them. Memories can be powerful especially trauma (Senah hit by a car). A soldier with PTSD hears a sound associating it with a past memory. He may not even know he's doing it, but feels it, re-experiencing the past. Some walk around re-experiencing horrible instances of abuse & react to people in ways we don't even realize we're doing because our heart-minds need rebooting. Until we bring every thought captive to Christ & apply truth to them, we can't be fully transformed into his ever increasing glory. Like deleting cookies from our hard drive, God renews our minds.

Science knows (advertisers too) how the mind operates in concrete experiential images, but Christians still exalt abstract truth, over concrete life-changing experiential truth. We dismiss imagination as child's play. We've installed cookies in our minds which make us afraid of words like vision, visualize, or imagination, because of the New Age movement of past decades - we're programmed to think it's all wrong.

The world knows the power of concrete experiential imagery. It's how the world speaks to us, but much of it's messages are lies - bikini clad girls won't chase me down if I spray cologne all over myself! The images we indulge ourselves in move us, we feel them & experience them - some are good images. **Justice & equality all came alive through Daniel Day Lewis's portrayal of Honest Abe in the movie *Lincoln* & you'll never view Abe the same way again. He was made real to us.** Who can watch *Les Miserables* without shedding tears? It's the Gospel effect animated through the French Revolution! We see sacrifice, love, forgiveness, grace & mercy lived out in image, character & song - we feel the loving sacrifice when Eponine sings while dying in Marius's arms.

In *The Bible* series on TV people experienced the story of Scripture through concrete experiential imagery. A CNN reporter said, "It sounds strange to me to say that a show about the Bible was a hit, but it was. Many people said that the last episode moved them to tears" They could experience the story through imagery with reason & emotion commingled. But many images we're bombarded with don't reflect Jesus. They move us away from experiencing the concrete transformative power of Him; they're damaging.

And all we've armed ourselves with is abstract theological truth to do battle. That's why we say we believe in God, but feel so dead & dry - all we have is information. Satan robs us of all the beautiful concrete truth experiences which settle it in our soul Jesus is real - We can't battle all the imagery with only abstract information. It's why personal testimony's so powerful in seeing people experience Christ - because it's one step closer to experiencing the emotion of the story & the concrete change in a life - although it's still abstract, you can't argue the experience of someone else's testimony. And typically through theirs, we recall something of our own story.

We must rediscover a flesh & blood theology through contemplation, seeing Jesus with our minds eye. To experience, touch him, stick your finger in his side, take on life, be

animated. ‘But Jason, John could see & touch Jesus. But Jesus isn’t here now, how do we have a flesh & blood theology now when we can’t see him?’ The Inner Sanctum - the bridge between our concrete experiential flesh & blood world & the spiritual truths of the Bible. God gave us imagination as a tool to engage the Inner Sanctum with the Holy Spirit - this isn’t inferior to abstract truth as the Greek would say. It’s not ‘make believe’ as a Naturalist may think. It’s not New Age - it’s contemplating biblical truth, focusing thoughts on Jesus, contemplating the Lord’s glory & being transformed by it.

Going back to last weeks passage, 2 Cor. 3 & 4 ¹⁴ *But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away.* ¹⁵ *Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts...* ³ *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.* ⁴ *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

Without Jesus we can’t enter into the reality of who God is. ¹⁶ *But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.* ¹⁷ *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.* ¹⁸ *And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit....* ⁶ *For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.*

Taking on his glory, all that the Lord is by nature becomes ours by grace. Transformed into his likeness as we behold Him. **Hebrews 12:1-2** *...let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith...* Jesus had been gone for decades when this was written, but the author speaks of fixing our spiritual eyes on Jesus. And all that is by nature Gods, becomes ours by grace as we run the race marked out before us.

Colossians 3:1-3, *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds (*phroneō*) on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*

‘Set your minds’ - *phroneō* - includes the idea of imagination & often the word is only translated as imagination. Set your hearts & minds on things above, imagine the truth, your life’s *hidden with Christ in God!* These could be lifeless words to us, unless we set our unveiled inner eyes on this truth. What does that look like to you? What images come to mind? How does it affect you? What does a person who has died to this world of sin (not of creation), but now lives within God act & feel toward others? Imagination brings us into the Inner Sanctum, the bridge between the abstract & the concrete flesh & bone experiential world. It’s not just knowing the information, its Truth getting inside & animating our hearts which transforms us.



Origen in the early 3rd century wrote in his Homily on Genesis, ‘Let us therefore always fix our gaze on this image of God so that we might be able to be reformed in its likeness...by contemplating (beholding in the mind) the divine image in whose likeness God has made...[us, we will] receive through the Word & his power that form which had been given him by nature.’ Paul already said it - by contemplating truth we’re transformed into the likeness of Jesus. We see God as love, we become more loving - or as forgiving, we become more forgiving. As we see the freedom he brings, we can live in freedom. We’re transformed from one degree of glory to another as we gaze upon the Perfect One & Truth is made flesh in us.

The incarnation wasn’t just an advantage to the 12 disciples. How could Jesus say to us, ‘If you see me, you see the Father,’ and have that only benefit the disciples who’d physically seen him? We know intuitively that’s not what he meant. He’s proclaiming truth beneficial to everyone throughout history. How can you see what God’s like if you don’t physically see Jesus? We have the Inner Sanctum to meet with Jesus & truth comes alive in us.

St Francis de Sales in his *Introduction to the Devout Life* in the 16th century wrote, ‘By means of the imagination we confine our mind within the mystery on which we meditate, that it may not ramble to & fro, just as we shut up a bird in a cage or tie a hawk by his leash so that he may rest on the hand.’

It’s something we’ve all experienced, if we don’t focus our mind on truth our brain flutters all over the place like a bird in a room - because our brains are wired for reality & prayer seems like an abstraction. If we don’t engage our imagination then our brain wants to go to the concrete images of the grocery list, car repairs, report cards & unruly two year olds. Then we get upset with ourselves, ‘How come I can’t get focused?’ Our prayer life needs to become as vivid as TV commercials. That’s what St Francis was talking about - imaginative prayer directed at Jesus through His Word actually tethers it strongly to the only thing that can be 100% trusted, giving it a place to land.

In the 16th century St Ignatius of Loyola used to run 30 day imaginative cataphatic prayer retreats. He said, “It’s not knowing a lot, but grasping things intimately & savoring them that fills & satisfies the soul..” We have access to more information than Ignatius - if you have the Scriptures & the Holy Spirit, you’re unveiled & can contemplate Jesus well. It’s not all the vast information which transforms you, it’s the intimate time before Christ...if you could spend time contemplating just one verse a day, imagine what the Holy Spirit could do in & through you?

He continues... “Pray with all ‘five senses’. ...see the persons with the eye of the imagination...imagine hearing what they say...imagine I smell & taste the infinite savor & sweetness of the Divinity...imagine touching...by embracing & kissing the place where the persons step or sit...” This is old Christian practice. Contemplate. Image truth. Put yourself in the story. Taking the time to enter the Inner Sanctum, meeting with Jesus with a redeemed imagination we savor the sweetness of Divinity.



A helpful resource is *Sacred Listening* by James L Wakefield - a translation of Ignatius's 30 day prayer class. Or, the *Prayer on The Go* app in the newsletter sent this week.

In jhn 5 Jesus is addressing Jews who've studied the Scriptures just for informational sake. Let's end today by contemplating for a few moments his response to them in vv39-40, and I have put a question at the top which may help to tether your thoughts.



Community Group Questions

Ice Breaker: If you were mayor for the day what three things would you change about your town?

Discuss your interactions with the ANIMATE booklet & sermon this week: What came out of your prayer times in your imaginative cataphatic place this week? What struck you the most from the sermon?

Imaginative Prayer Exercise from John 8:2-11, the story of the adulterous woman (**print out the following page to give to them in order to follow along and take notes**)

1. Explain that you want everyone to close their eyes and go into a contemplative prayerful place.
2. You will read the passage twice slowly as they prayerfully listen.
3. During the first reading, they are to imagine themselves as the woman, what does she feel, what does she see, she's sitting on the ground in front of men about to be stoned, what emotions does that bring to her? How does she react to Jesus?
4. During the second reading, have them imagine they were one of the other men. What feelings are in them, from beginning to end of the story? How do they react to Jesus?
5. Have them jot down thoughts, feelings or images as they do this to be shared in the group later.

In this sermon Jason quoted Richard Foster who said, *“To believe that God can sanctify & utilize the imagination is simply to take seriously the Christian idea of incarnation.”*

Discuss what this quote means to us. What does it look like to have Christ incarnated in us?

1. If SANCTIFY means *set apart & declared holy or consecrated*, what does it mean for us to be sanctified & transformed into the likeness of Christ?
2. Can you identify & share ways in which Christ has been incarnated in your life?
3. How have you changed as a result of contemplating Truth & the Lord's Glory?
4. Read aloud again 2 Corinthians 3:14-18 and discuss how sanctification happens according to them.
5. What holds us back from entering into this practice more deeply? What is your largest roadblock to spending this intimate time with Jesus? What can you do to put yourself before him for this to happen?



Imaginative Prayer Exercise
John 8:2-11
The Adulterous Woman

1. In this exercise we will be going into a contemplative prayerful place together
2. We will read the passage twice slowly aloud as everyone prayerfully listens. You may follow along here, or simply close your eyes and listen
3. During the first reading, imagine yourself as the woman...
 1. What does she feel & see?
 2. She's sitting on the ground in front of men about to be stoned, what emotions does that bring to her?
 3. How does she react to Jesus?
4. During the second reading, imagine you are one of the men.
 1. What do you feel from beginning to end of the story?
 2. How do you react to Jesus?
5. Jot down thoughts, feelings or images as you do this to be shared in the group later.

JOHN 8:2-11

2 At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. **3** The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group **4** and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. **5** In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" **6** They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. **7** When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." **8** Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. **10** Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

11 "No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."