

## 1 John 4

I'm realizing that the letters from John get pretty repetitive. He just keeps hammering home that idea that if one doesn't not believe Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh, you're wrong. And if you teach that he did not come in the flesh, you're an anti-Christ.

To clarify, this isn't the same as the anti-Christ in the book of Revelation. That anti-Christ seems to stand for a political figure opposed to Christ. Or in the way many think it should be interpreted, that anti-Christ stands for all political figures who are opposed to the reign of Christ over heaven and earth.

These anti-Christ in John's letters are sort of mini-anti-Christ or something. They're false teachers.

And then of course the second thing that John keeps hammering on is love. In this understanding, love isn't just something we do. It's who we are when we are drawn into the life of the risen and ascended Christ.

As God is love, when we're drawn into God's realm, we too are love.

This is all sort of hard to visualize in any logical way. But when Jesus became flesh, he was God in the flesh of one human. With his death, resurrection, and ascension, that incarnation takes root in all believers.

In us. That's pretty remarkable. To believe that Christ is incarnate in you...to believe that he is embedded in your own flesh and blood...is what constitutes salvation. It has an eternal reach, but it's already started.

It's one thing to deny in some sort of abstract way that Christ was God, come into the world as a flesh and blood human.

After all, that was 2000 years ago. And we weren't there.

But Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension enables him to be real to us. It's the Christ incarnate in the gospel word we hear in worship and the bread and wine of communion that make him real to us.

And, it's in the Christ incarnate in us and those around us that make him real to us. And also less pretty. Because then we have to deal with all the ways we and those around us deny Christ's incarnation.

Because to deny Christ's incarnation...his embodiment...is to deny it in those around us. Incarnation is an affirmation that we...bodies and all...are created in God's image...that bodies are good.

The consequences of denial of that are fairly obvious when it comes to understanding the heresy of Gnosticism. I talked about that last week. It's a heresy which says that escape from our evil bodies and escape from this evil physical world is the goal of salvation. That is not compatible with a God who chose to become human.

The incarnation also flies in the face of that religious view which sees utter destruction of creation and the rapture of a small segment of people as the end goal. It does not make sense that God would destroy the world he created out of love, and that he so loved he sent Jesus to save it.

When either of those ideas shape our worldview, taking care of our own bodies and those of others...or taking care of the world in which we live...are not of much importance. We just gotta be good enough...or have a good enough relationship with Jesus to be in the escape pod and not be left to be annihilated. It doesn't take much reading of the actual gospels to recognize that as a lie.

It does not make sense that God would become human for the sake of the cosmos, only to then destroy most of it.

Those beliefs get played out in all sorts of disastrous ways today. Lack of concern for the environmental health of the planet is one.

But the one that keeps rearing its ugly head is the belief that we can decide some people do not bear the image of God and that they were somehow excluded from Christ's incarnation.

When we feel comfortable making someone not quite human there's not much evil that can't be justified.

And that's exactly what white supremacy does. White supremacy was literally invented to say that people of African descent were not really human. And if they're not really human, folks could justify enslaving them and buying and selling them as things, not people.

It would be nice to say that white supremacy isn't really a thing anymore. But it's not so easily done. Several hundred years of that is not easily undone.

We just saw the consequences of that this past week. White supremacy led to the deaths of 10 people in Buffalo, New York.

In the massacre in Buffalo, nobody will deny that it was racially motivated. The shooter made it pretty clear that it was.

And really, probably nobody will deny that the vast majority of Americans are nowhere near that racist. But, what we will try to deny is that the deep seated racism that led to it is something that infects our whole society, even if it's usually subtler.

I'd never heard of the Great Replacement Theory until this happened. That's the belief that either the Jews, or the Democrats, or maybe both, advocate unrestricted immigration of people from developing countries...Central and South America, Asia, Africa...to replace white people with people of color who in theory then are more likely to vote Democrat.

It really only works if you decide these supposed replacement people are an inferior sort because they're not white.

As a Christian preacher, I believe it would be irresponsible to not publicly proclaim how unchristian this is.

Apparently, this young killer was a big believer. And maybe it's easy for all of us to say the theory is ludicrous. But if we really dig, we will likely find more subtle ways the underlying principles of this theory have influenced us.

For example, we have to honestly face our complicity in the dehumanization of immigrants that has always been an ugly underpinning in a nation that prides itself as being a nation of immigrants.

We can have all sorts of debate and disagreement about how best to manage immigration. What we as Christians cannot support is casting them as less than human. When we put them in cages...when we post things on social media that depict asylum seekers as invaders...we are making them less than human. When we do so we are in fact denying what Christ's incarnation was all about.

We are denying that Christ's incarnation somehow excluded them.

That's exactly what White Supremacy does. And it continues to do it, although usually in less subtle ways than gunning down people in a grocery store in a predominantly Black neighborhood. For the most part, white supremacy, whether we want to admit that's what it is or not, is what enables us to live relatively unconcerned by the massive inequality between races in nearly all measures of well-being – economic, educational, health care, home ownership, incarceration rates, and so on.

White supremacy smashes both parts of John's big two here – the conviction that Christ's incarnation has something to say about all bodies, and that Christ's incarnation in us means loving others is simply who we are supposed to be. Love for God and hate for others absolutely cannot co-exist.

The great replacement theory is based on fear. Frankly, I suspect that all of the racist backlash against racial progress over the centuries since 1619 is based in fear. If we are to believe John, fear and love can't co-exist.

As God is love, we too are called to be love...to be the community that shows the world what love looks like. We do that when we treat everyone like they are Jesus himself. And when we are honest that we don't see some people that way.