

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers

Sunday, January 11, 2026

We're going to read from the Gospel according to John. But before we do that, I invite you to get comfy in your pews. Let your shoulders relax a bit. Close your eyes. Take a prayer posture and take a deep breath in with me. Breathe it out slowly.

Another deep breath in. And breathe it out slowly. And breathe in God's mercies.

Breathe out God's mercies to others. Breathe in God's mercies and breathe out God's mercies to others.

Gracious spirit, you are as close as our very next breath. So we pray that you would dwell within us and around us. That you might by your power quiet within us any voice but your own this day, that we might hear your word for us, that indeed it might take on flesh in our lives. So may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

The Gospel according to John, the 1st chapter, verses 1-5 and then moving ahead to 14-18. Let us listen together for God's word to each of us and indeed to the church.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

And the word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. From his fullness, we have all received grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself, God, who is close to the father's heart, who has made God known.

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our lord endures forever. Amen.

So this series, for us, this series framed by an important question that Jesus asked of his disciples. "Who do you say that I am?" It's going to be a series that theologians would call Christological. Okay, Christological. So we are going to spend time wrestling with Christology, and that is who we trust and believe Christ to be and the person and the nature that is made known to us in the flesh of Jesus. Who is it that we claim Christ to be? I'm only kind of embarrassed to tell you that I made it through three years of seminary classes, an extra year and a

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half in the field, and I made it all the way through without what I think probably any of my professors would have defined as a clear Christology, that is, an easily articulated understanding of who Jesus the Christ is. I had a relationship, right? I understood the body of Christ that was the church. But through no fault of my professors, I stumbled my way all the way through, and I couldn't have told you a whole lot about what I believed about Christ. Okay? And I say that because it was three years into ministry that I stumbled upon a teacher that changed not only my life and my faith but also gave me what I would now call Christology. Okay, an understanding of who Christ is. Many of y'all are probably familiar with a Catholic theologian. His name is Richard Rohr. Anybody familiar with Richard Rohr? Okay, lots of hands go up. Right. So, the first thing that I was introduced to in parish ministry, one of my church members sent me a morning devotional, a daily devotional that Richard Rohr sends out every morning. Anybody take that daily devotional in their inbox? Yeah, lesser. That's okay. For those of you who raise your hand and know who he is, and those of you who don't, you can with an easy check of a subscription box receive daily emails—all right, I'm not getting paid for this—from Richard Rohr from the Center for Action and Contemplation, okay? And I started doing that pretty soon after I graduated seminary and got into ministry. And so I knew who he was. I would read his devotions every morning. I was astounded that someone could come up with such deep and meaningful and beautiful language every single day. I can barely come up with 20 minutes for a Sunday morning, right? And I realized he has like a full staff to put together these emails. Okay. And a lot of books that they draw from. But I knew who this guy was, right? He had really shaped my daily practice of discipleship. And I was on this other site, a site called The Work of the People. I've talked about it before. You all may or may not know that when we talk about liturgy, Christian liturgy, if you go back to the root word for what liturgy means, it can be defined as the work of the people. The idea is this thing that we are doing here, the liturgy that we are practicing together is indeed the work of the people of God trying to be faithful to God. Right? So there's this website called *theworkofthepeople.com*. It still exists. I commend it to you. I was on there one day looking at different videos, trying to find some extra inspiration for a sermon that had nothing to do with Christology, but I stumbled upon this video. The title of it is The Cosmic Christ. The Cosmic Christ. I want you to write that down actually, okay? Or type into your phone. Don't type into your phone. Leave your phone on 'do not disturb' in here, but write it down. The Cosmic Christ, okay? At *theworkofthepeople.com*. It's a 12 minute video. I stumbled upon it. I only watched it because Richard Rohr was the focus. He was tagged in it, right? I watched it, and it was 12 and a half minutes long, and I had to pause it halfway through because what he was revealing in this teaching was like so transformational, so unique in the way he articulated what he was saying about Christ. I ended up spending the better part of an afternoon watching the video on repeat because I was so floored by the teachings that he had to share about Christ. I commend it to you. It's going to be a beautiful afternoon, but it's cold, right? Go for a walk and then watch this video.

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You can sign up for a 7-day free trial or you can help out some folks at a little website, right? The Cosmic Christ. The reason I was floored is because he began to articulate Christ—the meaning, the nature, the person of Christ in Jesus in a way that I had never heard before. He started talking about something called the Christ mystery. The Christ mystery. He actually said that we Christians have a difficult time developing Christology because we, for the greater part of the last couple thousand years, have forgotten that Christ is not Jesus's last name. Some of y'all know that Christ means anointed. Both in the Hebrew and the Greek, Christ is either anointed or the anointed one. Jesus is referred to often in the New Testament text as Jesus the Christ, right? Also as Jesus Christ, but it would have been understood to those who heard it. It was Jesus, the anointed one, Jesus, the anointed, right? He says that we've forgotten that and in forgetting that we've forgotten something much bigger.

We've forgotten the cosmic nature of this one that is the Christ.

He says that in scripture as it attests to not only in the Gospel according to John but in First John and in Ephesians and in Colossians, lots of Paul's writings as well, there is a very clear picture that the Christ existed from all eternity, from all eternity. That there was this creative force or word as the Gospel of John calls it, names it, that has existed before time. In fact, everything that has been created has been created through this word. That's what the Gospel of John begins to attest to.

And that this Christ, this Christ is the creative energy that takes on flesh in Jesus. I love the language that he used that was Trinitarian. He said, "As we understand the Christ mystery, we gain a different knowledge and language around the Trinity. We're able to say to people who ask us that there...we believe as those who believe in the Trinity...there is a dimension of God that is formless. We call that dimension of God God the Father. There is a dimension of God that is form. We call that person that dimension Jesus. And there is a dimension of God that is energy and communion between parent and son that we call Spirit." He introduces what he calls the Christ mystery, which he says actually begins about 16 and a half billion years ago. He says the Christ mystery is the mysterious joining together of matter and spirit. Matter and spirit. This creative thing that the Gospel begins to speak of mysteriously. We first have it revealed to us in the creation story, right? Scientists would call it the big bang, right? That scares you, you don't have to. There's this joining together the spirit of the divine and of matter that become incarnate in the world.

What Rohr kind of unpacked over time was this thing that the Gospel of John gets to, and that is that at a particular point in time about 2,000 years ago, it's astounding that we actually believe

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this, that that same Christ mystery took a new dimension to it. Matter and spirit, flesh and spirit were joined together in the person of Jesus, the Christ, the one who incarnates the mystery in the world. Okay? And the contention is that we needed the binding together of this Christ mystery in the particularity of Jesus, in the particularity of Jesus, so that we could indeed look upon the enfleshed God, right, fall in love, draw closer to in relationship. The contention is people don't give their lives for an idea, they don't fall in love deeply with an idea, that they fall in love with that which is in the flesh. And so 2,000 years ago, this Christ mystery makes itself manifest in the person of Jesus. The scripture that we read before our baptism this day talks about how Jesus was indeed anointed as the Christ by the Holy Spirit. That's scripture.

Rohr's contention is that this mystery, this Christ mystery, is actually the key to unlock a different way of moving through the world. He says that the word became flesh, as the Gospel of John revealed, so that we could look upon it, so that we can marvel at it, so that we can fall in love with it. But not simply so that we could stop there. He says that Jesus the Christ becomes the particular manifestation, incarnation of our God, so that we can see the way in which spirit and matter are joined together and God is present there. But what is true of Jesus the Christ, we are to continue on our journey to say, is also true of you and of me and indeed of all creation. Okay? That anytime we see spirit and matter joined together, we see Christ. That means that you, spirit and matter joined together, participate, are a manifestation of the Christ mystery. It means that the one seated beside you in the pew this day, spirit and matter, joined together, participate in, are manifestations of the Christ mystery. His contention, Rohr's contention, but also the Gospel writer's contention, is that when we begin to wrestle with that mystery, our hearts, our minds, our souls change.

When we see that anytime spirit and matter are joined together, there Christ is, we begin to treat ourselves differently, perhaps with more grace and kindness, perhaps with more love and care. When we see spirit and matter joined together, participating in the mystery that is Christ in our neighbor, we look upon our neighbor differently. We feel for our neighbor in a different way. We love them in a different way because we believe as we love Christ, spirit and matter joined together, as we love Christ, so we love our neighbor. As we love our neighbor, so we love Christ. That's revealed to us in scripture as well. Any time matter and spirit join together, there Christ is. The contention is that our great mistake, and the great mistake not only that we hold together here in 2026, but the great mistake of those who have tried to follow in the way of Jesus the Christ over the last couple thousand years, the great mistake, the great sin even, is forgetting. It's as simple as that. It is forgetting that anytime matter and spirit come together there Christ is. And yet, as we claimed in our confession, we forget. And when we forget, there are implications. When we forget that spirit and matter come together in the tree and in the sky and in the flower

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and in the grass, we treat creation in ways that don't care for creation, in ways that pollute and destroy and break down. When we forget that when spirit and matter are joined together in the one that we have partnered with for life, we treat our spouse or our partner or our friend in a way that doesn't reflect the love and grace of Christ. When we forget that spirit and matter are joined together in every one of our neighbors, it is the reason why we allow war to happen, killings to happen, injury to happen, because we have simply forgotten that each and every single one of us is the joining together of spirit and matter and a participant in the mystery that is Christ.

It is forgetting that is our great sin. It is forgetting that leads to so much destruction in our world.

It is not hard for us to look upon the world, even specifically upon our nation in these days, and to note the forgetting, the way in which we somehow have forgotten that anytime flesh and spirit are drawn together, there Christ is.

The contention of Rohr, the contention of the Gospel of John, indeed the contention of Jesus the Christ, is that anytime spirit wraps itself in flesh, there is something divine and holy and sacred. And yet we forget. I made it through three years of seminary, a year plus a ton of out in the field. And I didn't have a real developed Christology. My hope is over the next five weeks we might collectively remember, and in our remembering we might be re-membered one to another, that we might develop together this new idea that is a real old idea, actually before time, that when matter and spirit, flesh and spirit join together, there Christ is.

And I want to posit to you that the Gospel writer includes this description of Christ, because the Gospel writer believes that it will change your life to understand this mystery. Okay? It will change the way that you move and live in the world. It'll change the way you read the news or watch the news. It'll change the way you show up to your friends and to your partner, to your parents, to your children. It will change the way that you disciple Christ in the world. Okay? It'll do that in what I would consider really significant ways and maybe even in trivial ways. I live on Central. I live close to the end of Central where it dead ends right there into Goodlett. Anybody know the Central-Goodlett intersection? Okay. Keep your hand raised if you believe it to be the most agonizing and terrible intersection in all the city. There's a lot of bad ones here, y'all. But that one is one that really drives me nuts. Specifically, it drives me nuts because you know that center lane, that's the one that you have to be in in order to turn left onto Goodlett and then immediately right onto Poplar. Okay? That center lane becomes the most clogged of all the lanes, okay, especially when PDS is letting out. Okay, I drive that half a dozen times a week. Every time I approach that intersection, I see a line forming in the center lane, and I think about another way. The other way is to go in the left lane, the turn lane, to make a quick turn and then

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immediately merge over and take a right onto Poplar. The devil sits on my shoulder and tells me, "You can do that." If I'm being really honest, I've done it too many times. This week, I was driving that way, heading out to get my ears lowered, and I saw the line forming in the center lane. I was wrestling with seeing the image of God in everyone, the flesh and the spirit joined together in the Christ mystery, all of us participants in it. I saw the lane getting long in the center and I saw the left lane. It was agonizingly short, tempting. I made my way over there thinking "no one will recognize me."

The red light was there. I had a moment to think. I looked over to my right. The senior pastor of Second Pres was in his pickup truck right beside me. I looked forward. I looked over. I looked forward. I thought to myself in that moment in the most trivial way possible, right? Would I want someone to turn left and then merge quickly in front of me? The answer was no. I made a left. I went all the way down to Walnut Grove and took a right. I added five minutes to my journey, but in a tiny, trivial, even dumb way, I recognized the way in which the one beside me was deserving of respect and care too. In Memphis driving, you might have a thousand opportunities to do what I just described to you, right? What I want to posit to you is that really seemingly trivial moments in our lives when we simply pause and we look to our neighbor and we see someone who is in need of care and then we decide to practice care, then we kind of, we become participants in this mysterious thing that builds love and care and respect. And there's a thousand decisions you're going to make this week that are infinitely more important than that one. Right? But I want to posit to you that when we begin to stack decision after decision on top of each other, something within us begins to change. When we look upon our neighbor as we leave this place this day, as we're making our way back home, when we read in the news of someone who has been killed, when we look upon our city and we see the vast difference in wealth and care and provision, when we do all of these things, holding up the mystery that is the Christ mystery, I want to posit to you that by the power of the spirit, our lives, our hearts, our souls can be changed.

So, here's what I want to do. I want to invite you into the mystery over the next five weeks. I want you to go home today. I want you to subscribe to a website for seven days—*the work of the people*. I want you to watch 12 and a half minutes of a video called The Cosmic Christ. Okay? And then maybe if you're like me, you'll want to watch it again and again, and it'll blow your mind over and over and over again. And I want you to think about the ways in which the particular nature of Christ, flesh and spirit, matter and spirit being joined together, how that is... you are a participant in that. And not just you, but all that you will look upon this week—the tree, the sky, your neighbor, your supposed enemy—all participate in this mystery that has existed from all eternity. So why don't we together develop a Christology over the next five weeks. Amen.

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Let's pray.

Gracious and loving one, you come to us wrapped in flesh in the person of Jesus the Christ. Your word that created, your word that claimed us, your word that called us beloved, that word wraps itself in flesh and lives and dwells among us so that we might fall in love, not only with Jesus, but with our neighbor. What we pray for, Lord, is that over the next several weeks, you might reveal to us in your image, the imago dei, in indeed your crucifixion, in your resurrection, indeed, your going ahead of us, we pray that you might reveal to us a deeper, a broader, a more loving understanding of who we say Christ is. Give us your wisdom to walk in these days. Remind us, re-member for us that indeed when spirit and flesh, spirit and matter are drawn together, there you are. Remind us and transform us. For we ask it in the name of the one who took on flesh, Jesus the Christ. Amen.