



WESTMINSTER  
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# **Snipe Hunts and the Word Made Flesh**

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and the Word Made Flesh**  
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## Snipe Hunts and the Word Made Flesh

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*1 Thessalonians 2:1-8*

*John 1:10-18*

How many of you have ever been on a Snipe Hunt? Do you even know what a snipe hunt is?

Maybe you remember in the movie “Up”, the grandfather sends the kids out to look for snipe to get them out of the house.

Snipes are a real bird, but a snipe hunt is anything but real.

The way we would ‘hunt snipe’ in my small town in rural Louisiana was to invite a newly arrived immigrant from the city or from up north to go out at night to catch the delicious, but elusive snipe!

The best place to find them, we would say, was some soy bean field way out in the country, and the only way to catch these snipe, we would tell the unsuspecting hunter “victim”, would be for us to chase the snipe from one end of the field so the snipe would run toward the flashlight that was in the big feed sack he or she would be holding at the other end of the field, and when the snipe are all in, just close up the bag.

So we would get them in place at their end of the field, and off we’d go back to the other end of the field, and we’d start ‘hooping and hollering’ all the way back to town to the A&W drive-in to enjoy hamburgers and root beer and good laughs for a couple of hours!

All the while, there they were in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of the night, left holding the bag!

That's how some people see the Christian faith; just one big snipe hunt; promises a lot, but you're left holding the bag.

Or as an anonymous voice mail I received said, "Do you really believe what you preach? It's a lot of claptrap: Jesus walking on water, rising from the dead, people hearing voices and calling it God. It's all craziness, this talk about people loving each other. Just look at the world around you. How can you believe it?"

Many people have left the Christian faith saying, "I was taught to love my neighbor, love one another, but the church is so judgmental...I hear them talk about each other, see how they treat each other...where's Jesus?"

Or even more, maybe you've been the victim of some religious snipe hunt: feeling like you're all alone, middle of the night in the middle of nowhere, left holding the bag of no good news.

When life has tumbled in on you, when faith is stretched thin, when you have to wonder why you believed it in the first place.

It happens to the best of us. Maybe you've read about the letters of Mother Theresa. This wonderful saint wrote about her doubts, her feelings of emptiness and distance from Jesus Christ.

She had received the promise of Christ, had experienced the deep joy and peace of the reality of Jesus in the early years of her life, and that is why the emptiness was so difficult for her to fathom in her later years

For the Thessalonians, they, too, felt a distance, an emptiness. They had given themselves to Jesus Christ.

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They had been promised Jesus would return. The fact was, he had not returned. Had they accepted Paul's message of fake news? Were they holding an empty bag of religious snipe?

Paul's word to them, to us, is that this gospel of Jesus Christ is not a snipe hunt: "Our coming to you was not in vain," is the way he puts it.

We never told you God's truths to flatter you or to get something for ourselves. We did not give you, he says, an empty bag to hold on to.

We gave you the gospel of God, the good news who is Jesus Christ, and we gave you ourselves.

This is the truth of what John would write some 35 years later, "The word became flesh and dwelt among us..."

That is the gospel given us, to this church that began a little over seventy years ago, to each of you, maybe in this place, maybe in another place, but it's the same gospel, the word made flesh.

But we seem to face the same reality that John wrote about when he said that the word 'was in the world, yet the world did not know him, that Jesus came to his own, that is, humanity, and his own people did not accept him.'

Was that the case some two thousand years ago, that so many people simply could not get past their feelings when it came to the truth standing right in front of them, when it came to forming their beliefs, their faith, their way of life?

Or is it a modern phenomenon, this cultural condition in which people are more interested in what their online podcast or radio or television political or religious or economic or whatever talk show host says than in actual facts of the matter.

Like the cartoon I saw of a man sitting in front of his computer, and the screen said, "You're right and everybody else is wrong." And he said, "I think I've finally found a website that tells the truth."

It's a cultural condition that has a name: "post truth." It means that "objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief."

We are living in a social-media world where everyone can be an expert, devotees of the Google Holy Book, following whatever prophet of the podcast preaches your opinion.

We have access to easy and ever-available pipelines of information, without any quality control as to the trustworthiness of the source, the factual accuracy, or the factual accuracy of what comes our way.

And it is that erosion of truth and, indeed, loss of faith in truth as anything other than the view I already hold, that makes some of the most acute, critical problems facing our world more and more difficult to even have a conversation about.

The Reverend James Gordon paints a bleak picture when he says, "Truth decay, low-grade anger and discontent, suspicion of the other who is not "us," politics gradually losing its moral compass, hardened ideologies and polarized communities, fear eclipsing hope, hate displacing love, rejection and not welcome as default to the stranger; these

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and other social patterns are seen...as the way of the fool that leads to conflict, alienation and ultimately death.”

When "Truth" disappears or is simply brushed away and ignored, then we're all just left holding an empty bag all by ourselves in the middle of nowhere.

As a theologian, I am especially concerned about American Christians' seeming lack of interest in truth.

Self-help guru Ashleigh Brilliant's wrote a book entitled "I Have Abandoned My Search for Truth and Am Now Looking for a Good Fantasy."

He may have meant this tongue-in-cheek, but I think the book title well describes the attitude of so many, including many Christians.

For Christians living in this post-truth culture, we need to hear again John's commitment to truth, *“that the word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.”*

Dag Hammarskjöld, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, said it wonderfully in his daily prayer:

*O God, Give us  
A pure heart  
That we may see Thee,  
A humble heart  
That we may hear Thee,  
A heart of love  
That we may serve Thee,  
A heart of faith  
That we may live Thee.*



Nothing vain, nothing for greed, nothing but the gospel...John lived with this truth: the good news of Jesus of Nazareth, a real man in a real world.

Jesus is not the product of our theology. Jesus is not a development of our doctrines. Jesus is not some word we pretend to chase into a snipe hunt bag.

Jesus is a real man in a real world, the mystery of the son of God come to earth. When he was hungry, he ate; when he was thirsty, he drank; he slept when he was tired, and he would sweat as he walked those hot, dusty roads.

He laughed at good stories, and he told good stories himself. He had friends whom he loved and who loved him.

Jesus is a real man who proclaimed the kingdom of God, the son of God who lived in our real world, and Paul gave that gospel of God to the Thessalonian church and now we have that gospel.

And we have to be very honest here, very clear.

To paraphrase the great biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann: Jesus was a dangerous man. He was crucified, not because he was nice, but because he told the truth, he was the truth.

Jesus spoke of the broad and narrow gates and the foolish and wise builders, choices as to the way of life we choose, or for us, the 'who' of life we choose.

The 'who' of life that insists on truth and trust, integrity and compassion, wisdom and understanding, not only as our way of life, but the ways for a society to save the life it is in danger of wasting and ultimately losing.

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We live Jesus Christ, that's what we're about here at Westminster Presbyterian Church, and what we try to share, try to teach, try to live: from the youngest child in a Sunday School class to the oldest.

We give ourselves in his name to others, beyond the walls of worship, away from creedal God-talk into actual deeds of God-walk, where our faith lives and grows in a real world with real people where opinions differ, personalities are strong, traditions reside, and things just do not always go as planned.

In this real world we live the truth of Jesus Christ.

Not my truth, not your truth, but together we live the truth of Jesus Christ.

Let me ask you to try something. If you will begin every day saying over and over within yourself:

*I am committed to God,  
And I have faith in God;  
I am a child of God;  
God is with me.  
I am God's partner;  
Working with God and for God,  
And God is working through me.*

Let me say it again:

*I am committed to God,  
And I have faith in God;  
I am a child of God;  
God is with me.  
I am God's partner;  
Working with God and for God,  
And God is working through me.*

It will change the way you work, the way you act, the way you speak, how you relate to others.

The gospel will be true in your life, and no one will be left holding the bag. They and you will be holding on to each other, living the word made flesh.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.



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