

**A Sense of Christmas:  
The Feel of Love  
Luke 1:39-45  
Micah 5:2-5a**

This has been a fall of dilemma! Every Saturday I have not known what to wear.

See this fall, my alma mater, Wake Forest University kept winning football games! 10 times we have won our game! To put that in perspective, the 4 years that I was a student at Wake Forest we only won 11 games—in 4 years! And one year we won 7! So this has been a miraculous incredible year!

And it is all because of me! Week after week I would settle down to watch the game on my computer, munchies close at hand, alone so I won't embarrass myself too much. (Actually Anita is almost used to it by now!) And week after week I would wear my Black and Gold hoodie. And we won!

But then one week, for some reason, I switched sweatshirts. And we lost! The next week I switched again and we won, but then....for some reason I went back to my hoodie and we lost! The karma had been disrupted.

Now we are heading into our bowl game against Texas A&M, a real football school, and I don't know what to wear!

Obviously I will wear something a Wake Forest sweatshirt, but which one? I have 5 if you count my Wake Div sweatshirt. So which one? We are talking cosmic karma here? It's not that I am superstitious or anything, but... I just don't know which one **feels** right. And it is about the feel, isn't it?

We all have those things that make us feel comfortable, that make us feel at home. It may be a piece of furniture, a special outfit, a dress, a coffee cup. It is an item that whenever we touch it, when we feel it, we remember, we are taken to a place, a time, a feeling. We are home.

When Alison was a baby Anita would take a cloth diaper and drape it across her shoulder after nursing to make sure that any after effect would be safe. And many times Alison would just fall asleep with her head on that piece of cloth.

As she grew older we no longer needed the cloth—but she did. Linus has his security blanket, Alison had her “puffy.” She would carry it around the house, whenever we went out, wherever she was. We thought we were smart because how would she ever know if we would switch. I mean, after all, a white cloth diaper taken out of this pack is just like all the other ones, right?

Wrong! She knew.

She could tell by the feel. She would rub it up against her cheek, smell it, and know. We finally got down to 2 that we could alternate during washing, but eventually it got down to 1. And everything in the world depended on it.

So we are coming home from the beach one year. It had been a wonderful week, and to make it even better we stopped just outside Florence to eat at Alison's favorite restaurant, McDonalds! She got out of the car, puffy in hand, and we suggested to her that she might want to leave it in the car! But she was as adamant as a 3 year old can be that she would not lose it. So in we went for a delicious dinner, a few minutes playing on the playground, we even got ice cream to go and headed for Greenville.

It was about an hour and a half later that she asked for it. Where is my puffy? Immediately we knew, but just to be sure, I stopped the car and we looked. Not to be found. We offered a substitute, but that would not suffice. I am not about to turn around and drive back to Florence, so we compromised. Use this one, and I will call and ask them if they can find it. After lengthy negotiations this was deemed acceptable. (Full confession. I didn't call. How could I ask someone to look for a puffy? I'm sorry Alison, but after a few weeks the new one felt right.)

It is the feel of things. Maybe you remember the feel from your childhood. Maybe you remember the feel from the days when you would wrap your baby up for a trip—to the store, for the trip up the stairs to bed. The feel of the fabric is enough to take us to that comfortable place. It is the feel of home, of security, of love.

Mary knew that feel. She knew what love felt like—growing inside her. She knew those little umphs that come in the middle of the night, or sitting at the supper table, those times when the child growing inside just needs to stretch. Maybe Joseph knew what it was like when Mary would say, "*Feel, the baby is kicking.*" And they knew that it wasn't just a dream.

Elizabeth knew what it was like to feel the love for a child long promised and finally coming to be. In her old age, battling rheumatism and morning sickness, she was still able to rejoice with her relative Mary when they got together to exchange pregnancy stories. There was a physical connection there—the babies jumping, as if even before birth they knew that they would be forever tied together—John and Jesus.

Friday, we will gather again in this place and hear the story of this season, "*The Word became flesh, and lived among us.*" Jesus, love incarnate, became flesh. The eternal Word of God wasn't some idea, some thought, some emotion. He was a touchable, feel-able person.

Maybe that is what we need to remember as we race to the climax of this season. Love isn't some esoteric idea. It is not some syrupy sentimentality. It is not the warm "hot chocolate feeling" in the pit of our stomach. No, real love is flesh and bones, it is touchable. It is feelable—not just on the inside, but on the outside as well.

That is the reason we have been rushing around these past few weeks, going to store to store, scouring e-stores with great intensity. We have been on a quest for the perfect present. But it really isn't the present we are seeking is it? The fact of the matter is that most of the presents we give our children tomorrow will be forgotten in a few months. The presents we give our spouse will be worn and out of size way too soon. That electronic device that you stood in line to buy for hours is already technologically out-of-date, or will be by this time next year.

It isn't the amount of money that we spend. We often forget this, getting sucked into a spending frenzy, being brainwashed into thinking that the more we spend the more meaningful the gift. But then the children enjoy playing with the box!

And we know this! But we rush to get the gifts anyway! Why? Because we want that person to have something to unwrap. We want them to have something that they can touch and feel and hold! We want to give them a tangible expression of our love. It is about having something to touch! That is what makes it real! The "feelableness" is the way we express our love!

You see, love demands that we do something. It may be teach Sunday School, or sing in the choir, or fix soup or windows, or mow the grass or share a poinsettia or, or, or... There are so many ways that we do things with our hands and voices and lives. We do them not because we have to, but because we are trying to put flesh and blood to our love—for God, for each other. We do so to live out the story that we tell this day. We do things to be the incarnation of God in our world.

That is why we invite people to officially join our church. That is why we invite people to give money during worship. That is why we sing hymns and read litanies. It gives us something to do!

But it is a risk. There is always that chance that our gift will not be understood, that the feel of the gift will not adequately express the depth of love we feel. We feel that hesitancy as the wrapping paper is torn away, as the box is opened. Have I expressed it right? Do they understand? Do they feel the love I am giving?

Maybe that is the way that God felt that night. Maybe that is the way God feels even today. Here is a gift of ultimate love--in the flesh and blood of a child, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. But there is no guarantee that it will be understood, that it will be appreciated. But God needed to express the depth of affection felt in the heart of the creator. And so God took the risk to give something that Mary could feel, that Joseph could hold. And even this day God comes to us, with the gift of incarnation.

Look around! Touch the person next to you. The body of Christ! A gift for you! Will you recognize it for the gift that it is? Look at yourself. Will you be the incarnation of Christ in this world—not just in felt emotion, but in shared life, in flesh and blood, in touchable ways?

When we were in Memphis last summer with Beau, Alison had a cloth diaper that she was using as a wipe. It wasn't anything, but it was everything. The feel of the cloth flooded me with memories—of babies, of comfort, of love. May our lives become that feel for our world—a gift from God, even this day.