

January 3, 2016

TEXT: John 1:1–18

TITLE: In the Beginning...

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

The writer of John begins his gospel unlike any other. Missing is the story of Christ's birth in Bethlehem, there is no declaration of a star appearing in the East, the no vacancy sign at the inn is not mentioned, no stable, manger, or animals witnessing the birth of the Christ child; visits from the Magi or three wise persons are not anywhere to be found, nor is Jesus' earthly genealogy delineated. Instead, the writer of John memorializes Christ's divine genealogy, reworking the categories of time, space and matter.

The writer begins: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." Summed up in this one seemingly simple yet complex statement is revealed the origin of Jesus the anointed, the Christ, his relationship with God and his identity as God. This statement in no way fits into what Christmas has become. There's no cue to begin the caroling, the gift giving, sharing with family and friends and all the celebratory aspects of Christmas are not where to be found or imagined in this opening statement.

In John's Christmas message, we can't ignore the reality that Jesus made his appearance in the world as divinity and yet in the flesh, as human. Although, John doesn't mention it, we can't forget Jesus had no biological, earthy father, was born to a teenage mother under less than ideal circumstances, and was forced to wander like a nomad the first few years of his earthly existence as there was a bounty on his life. No wonder there were those who didn't accept him as Lord and Savior. From their perspective, it would be difficult to reconcile that Mary and seemingly Joseph's son, was the savior of the world. Jesus completely human and divine had to face and deal with realities of entering into a world which was created perfect and yet was no longer. John says "He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being." Jesus was there in the beginning, at creation with God, when it was declared that everything which was created was good.

And yet, every day we hear of local, national and international tragedies, natural disasters, heinous crimes or accidents, poverty, suffering, death and despair. How do we reconcile what we know to be true, that Jesus Christ was indeed born, is the light of the world and came that we might have life and life more abundantly, and yet some people, communities and countries are hanging on by a proverbial thread?

Beloved, just as Jesus was with God in the beginning, he is the creative power of God at work today. We have the record of Jesus changing water to wine, calming the stormy sea, healing a woman with an issue of blood, walking on water, opening the eyes of a man born blind and raising the dead. And Jesus is still at work and with us today...opening eyes to see the needs that exists in our own backyards; softening hearts to serve others that they might have a quality of life, offering forgiveness; using our hands to build homes, work the soil that others might eat; empowering us to advocate for just laws and equal opportunities for everyone; opening minds to discover medical procedures and medication to heal the sick and infirmed; reconciling broken relationships where all hope may be lost; welcoming home those who's earthly assignments have come to an end and allowing us to enter into another year in spite of us, the condition of the world and violence that is often indiscriminate and could have visited our own doorsteps. God is still with us, as God was in the beginning.

Sometimes we get it twisted, thinking the Old Testament God judgmental, vengeful, destructive and stern. We surmise that in Jesus something changed the character and attributes of God, altering God's attitude towards humanity. When in actuality, in the beginning, God and Jesus have always been the same: gracious, loving, merciful, longsuffering, and faithful. In the beginning, it was Old Testament God who: kept a disobedient people through decades of exile and servitude; lead, guided and provided for a people for 40 years while in the wilderness; had a change of mind and didn't destroy cities that were evil, and performed miracle after miracle bringing life from bodies beyond child bearing years and breathing new life into dead bones.

In the birth of Jesus the Christ, God with us opened a metaphorical window in time that we might see, experience and understand the unchanging and eternal love of God as never before. The incarnation of God reintroduced the light, which had been with

humanity from the beginning; the light which had and would again put darkness to flight. Just as God moved upon the dark and formless chaos which was before the world began and declared: "Let there be light," displacing and overcoming the chaos that existed in the darkness; Jesus the light of the world, the light which was there at the beginning, still shines into darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it; and saves us from a life of complete chaos that would exist if we were left to our own desires, passions and fears, moving us from glory to glory.

And so, we asked ourselves this first Sunday in a new year, how does the Word fit into our present day reality? A new year where rhetoric, violence, destruction, pain and suffering seem to be so prevalent and relentless? We might begin to wonder, where is the Word who was with God in the beginning? Where is the Word who said he would never leave nor forsake us? Where is the Word who has made all things new? Where is the Word who shines light into darkness?

Today, as in the beginning, The Word brings a revealing light that shows us the reality of how things are; strips away our disguises, pretenses and the self we hide and conceal from the world. Jesus, the Word and revealing light shines on our stark nakedness, illustrating our true character and what we truly value. We never see our genuine selves until we see ourselves illuminated by the light of Jesus.

Today, as in the beginning, Jesus, The Word brings a guiding light; John states: if a person does not possess that light, they walk in darkness and does not know where they are going; when a person receives that light and believes in it, they walk no more in darkness (Jn 12:36, 46).

Today, as in the beginning, when the light of Jesus, The Word is revealed, our time of groping and guessing comes to an end, times of doubt, uncertainty and vacillation are gone. A path that was dark becomes clearly illuminated. Decisions that were wrapped in the darkness of indecisiveness and night are irradiated.

Brothers and sisters, I'm so glad that John's Gospel message condensed makes plain, the Word, divine Savior, God with us, has come into the world, has been rejected by many, but to all who believe he has given the power to become children of God and the gift of eternal life. The Message Bible sums it up as thus:

"The Word was made flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish."

This translation is something to shout about. It reminds us that God is indeed with us, living, guiding, lighting and directing us through life, even and most especially when life becomes difficult to navigate. God is not sitting high on the throne, but is with us in the grittiness and the joys of life, strengthening, and leading us from glory to glory. That's a reminder this new year, this new beginning... we are not in this life and world alone, as in the beginning, God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is near. Amen.