

John 1:1-18

1/5/14

Children of God, grace, mercy and peace to you from God our father and Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I want to try an experiment. See if you can complete these sentences

It was the best of times...it was the worst of times.

The hills are alive..... with the sound of music

A long time ago in a galaxy.... far far away.

The Lord is my Shepherd....I shall not want

These are opening lines from famous stories. When we hear them we remember the rest of the stories, or at least parts of them. It is common for scripture writers to quote a part of the story and let the reader fill in the rest. This is what John is doing as he begins his gospel.

In the beginning....he is referring to Genesis, the beginning of all things, to creation and he places Jesus at the center of it all.

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.

Our gospel reading for today is the prologue to the gospel according to John. He is giving us a summary of the whole story, he wants there to be no doubt who Jesus is from the very start.

Jesus was/is with God at the beginning

Jesus became human

Humans rejected him

Jesus still gives us grace, truth, life, and light.

John takes us back to creation to let us know Jesus was there with God. In the beginning was the Word. The Greek translation is logos, the spoken word. Jesus is the spoken word of God.

The spoken word of God created all there is. Nothing was created without the spoken word....without Jesus.

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 has not overcome it.

Have you ever been in total darkness? In darkness so deep you can't see the hand in front of your face? It is an uncomfortable feeling. I have been deep inside caves where no light can be found. I led a servant trip down to Arizona and one of the things we did was explore the tunnels Geronimo used to avoid capture. In the middle of the tunnel we turned off our lights and stared into the darkness. When you wake up in your home at night you can let your eyes adjust to the low light so you can at least make it to the bathroom without tripping over the furniture. But no matter how long we waited our eyes could find no light. It was uncomfortable, and began to get scary for some in our group. And so we let our lights shine in the darkness so we would not be overcome.

Without light, without Jesus, the world is a scary place. But the light of the world has come. The light has come in the form of a baby in a manger. This gospel reading, this prologue, is the incarnation; it is John's birth story. It is not like the birth stories we have read the last few weeks.

Matthew and Luke relate the birth of Jesus in human terms. Matthew tells the story from Joseph's side of the family. Tracing Jesus lineage backwards through his family tree and giving a typical father's account of the birth. Luke is more descriptive with shepherds, wise men, and angels singing praises to God. He tells more of Mary's story. Both of them are more focused on the human side of Jesus, tracing his roots back to the house of David, from where the Messiah will come.

John goes even farther back. Back to the beginning and places Jesus with God at creation. He wanted his readers to be certain of who Jesus is. Jesus was and is God. The spoken word of God, Jesus, loved us so much that he chose to become flesh and live among us. Emmanuel. God with us. God chose to slip into human skin full of grace and truth and show us his glory.

Jesus did not show up unannounced. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way, to testify to the light. He did a great job; he got people's attention and pointed them to Jesus. Maybe it was his weird diet, his strange wardrobe, or confusing riddles that got their attention. "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me". How can he come after me if he was before me? Either way, the Baptist did a great job preparing the way and announcing the kingdom of God. "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." That was his job, not to be the light but to point to the light.

Even though Jesus is the spoken word of God, even though he created the world, even though he came down from heaven to bring us light and life, the world did not know him. They did not understand. People were waiting for the light, they were waiting for the promised messiah, and even though John said he is the one, they did not understand.

They had a different idea of who the messiah would be. They wanted a powerful savior who would defeat their enemies. Jesus confused them with his message of grace and truth. They were looking for a conquering hero, Jesus came to serve. As my dad used to say, "My mind is made up, don't confuse me with the truth." Their minds were made up and Jesus confused them so much they ended up crucifying him on a cross.

What are you looking for in a savior? What are you hoping to see in Jesus? Some people believe that Jesus lived on earth, died on the cross, and rose again in order to make God love us. I think I believed that for a time. I thought Jesus had to pay the price for my sins and the only way God could love me was for Jesus to die on the cross. Justice had to be served. I am believing something different now.

As David Lose puts it: "the biblical witness urges us to focus instead primarily on God's love, contending that Jesus died on the cross not to **make** God love us but to show us **just how much God already loves us**. After centuries of communicating through the teachings of the law or the words of the prophets, God in Jesus takes on our human form and flesh, our human life and our lot, to speak more directly, more personally, more fully, to tell us how much God loves us, just how much God values us, just how much God desires for us, and through us for the world".

That is the promise of Christmas. That is the promise of the Christ child born in the manger. The spoken word of God came down from heaven and slipped into human skin because he loves you.

Jesus brought light into the world. He came to give us grace upon grace. He is the light of the world. The light of the world shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not and will not overcome it.

Thanks be to God! Amen.