

For the next 5 months or so we will take a journey through the Gospel of John. In the normal cycle of the Revised Common Lectionary, this lesson is often read either on Christmas Day or the Sunday following Christmas. John by far is the most beloved of the four Gospels. We will encounter the I am sayings, the Wedding at Cana and woman at the well. The first chapter of John is called the prologue and it really contains all the themes found in the entire Gospel. This first chapter has lots of deep messages that it is hard to wrap your brain around many of the words. I hope this morning we can just touch a bit on some general themes.

“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 overcome it”.

Picture of Earth

Since the word was God and was with God at the beginning, John begins reminds us of creation. When God speaks, when God acts, new life and new hope emerges. So this Word who will become Flesh is coming to bring life and light to all people.

This is one of my favorite quotes from Lily Tomlin

“Why is life so daily”

Where do you need new life in your life? Where do you need a new perspective? For some we are simply living in a rut of daily-ness. I am hoping that most of you have more going on in your life that watching reruns of Oprah? Some of us are carrying hurts, grudges, sins we have done and sins that have been done against us. We have carried them so long we have learned to simply live with them. Deep down we know whatever that baggage is, we have harmed ourselves and harmed others. We carry those things like a giant backpack and do you know what, after a while we don't even realize how heavy it is. Recall the words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest”

So the Word who becomes Flesh does so that you and I might have life. And it is not just any life we are talking about here. It is abundant life. It is a full life. It is a rich life. It is a life wrapped up in the love of God.

Picture of Christmas Tree Lights

Christmas time is a great time to seek God. People may not even recognize this. There is this hope that we will encounter the Holy One in some fashion especially at Christmas. For you see Christmas is not just an intellectual journey to encounter God. God is more than just an idea. Christmas is a time to encounter the Word made Flesh. This is why singing in the dark, with a little light in front of us, brings out all kinds of emotional memories. Unfortunately we lose a bit of that experience when we are forced to keep the lights on in our cafeteria. But, we still have that opportunity. You can create your own Candlelight experience. The other day, Jan and I just sat on the couch in the dark with nothing but the Christmas lights on. It is in this darkness, that we will find hope, wonder, light and joy. It is out of the darkness that we will discover God. So sometime before you put that tree away for the year, spend some time in darkness, and let the light of Christ dwell with in you.

We read in John 1:14

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only so, full of grace and truth”

The whole concept of God becoming human is ridiculous on the face of it. It is not something we expect of God. God is to be the all-powerful, the one who decides everything. We never can separate Easter from Christmas of course. We know the ultimate goal of God’s salvation for the world happens on Easter morning. But there are secondary gifts for the Word becoming flesh. One aspect of those gifts is the focus on community. For John, the Father and the Son are one. We are invited to join with Jesus as well. Jesus invites us to abide with him. But it is not just community with God, it is community with each other.

Picture of the Grinch

Almost any good Christmas story has a moment of change and out of that change, new life begins. George Bailey will discover he has a wonderful life. The Grinch has a heart that is two sizes too small. He hates Christmas. He thinks Christmas is all about gift giving and celebrating. So as he stands upon the mountain, with a sleigh full of toys he expects to hear Whoville going boo hoo. Instead he hears singing. Christmas, the Grinch discovers, is not about the gifts, it is about each other. It is about community. It is about spending time with friends and family. That sense of community changes the Grinch and his heart grows 3 times.

So one lesson Jesus will teach us is the value of each other. It is why loving thy neighbor is the second of the great commandments.

Picture of Disaster

Tragedy hits and it doesn’t matter if it is flood, fire or earthquake. One comment that emerges over and over again is the fact that those who survive have each other. This is why I might add, there is great power in singing Christmas carols together. For this moment, we are together, as family.

Lastly we read in John 1:18

“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.”

Do you want to know what God is like? It is easy. All you have to do is to know Jesus. A religion such as Christianity can get caught up into rules and regulations and lose sight of why we are Christians in the first place. This is why many have uttered the phrase, “I love Jesus, it is the church I can’t stand”. So what is God really like? Well scattered through this 1st chapter is a simple word known as Grace. The character of Jesus is a character of grace. He comes in grace and truth. We read in John 1:16

“From his fullness we have received, grace upon grace”

Grace means God does not hold our humanity against us. Grace means that all people are included in God’s family. We have a world who judges who’s in and who’s out. Did you ever notice that it is the ones in power, who make the rules? God’s way of looking at the world turns everything upside down.

It is the poor, the downtrodden, the outcast, the untouchable ones, who are rich in God's eyes. Jesus comes to earth so that we can know the depth of God's love for us. That depth will lead Jesus to the cross. It is this grace upon grace, this gift that continues to give that transforms us and the world. For we will sing tonight, Joy to the World, the Lord is come, let earth receive her King. Let every heart prepare him room and heaven and nature sing. Amen.