

Weekend of Sunday, January 5, 2020
2nd Sunday of Christmas/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year A
First Reading: Jeremiah 31:7-14
Second Reading: Ephesians 1:3-14
Gospel Reading: John 1:[1-9]10-18
Sermon Title: “Another Beginning”

Theme

John begins his gospel with this prologue: a hymn to the Word through whom all things were created. This Word became flesh and brought grace and truth to the world.

Text

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

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

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

¹⁴And 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.’”) ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.

Sermon

Interesting point of fact: the Second Sunday of Christmas only comes up in years when Christmas Day is a Wednesday through Sunday. For example, this year Christmas was on a Wednesday and so we have a Second Sunday of Christmas. But last year and the year before, Christmas of 2017 and 2018, there was no Second Sunday of Christmas.

Another interesting point of fact: when there is a Second Sunday of Christmas, during those five straight years when Christmas comes on a Wednesday through Sunday, the Gospel Reading is the same; the Gospel Reading we have for today from John 1.

I entitled this sermon, "Another Beginning" because, as I told you on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, each of the four Gospels has its own unique version of beginning.

We heard Matthew's version that Fourth Sunday of Advent and I told you then that only Matthew includes Joseph's consternation over Mary's condition in the story.

And then we heard Luke's version on Christmas Eve. Luke's version includes the angels and shepherds.

For the record, Mark does not include a birth narrative at all. Jesus, the grown man, followed John the Baptizer onto the scene and that was his beginning, according to Mark.

But John's version is "Another Beginning" altogether. In fact, "Another Beginning" may be inaccurate because it would appear that Jesus, known at the beginning of John's Gospel as simply "the Word" simply always was:

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

So I think John's position was Jesus, known as "the Word," never had a beginning. He just simply always existed along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, which is how human beings have come to understand the Triune Godhead.

What we have at Christmas is a celebration of the incarnation; incarnation meaning when God became human in the person of Jesus Christ.

Now, as I prepared this sermon I imagined at least two types of listeners: A believer like me, a cradle Christian, someone who has heard all the Gospel stories again and again all our lives. The story is practically speaking, a part of our DNA because we were simply raised with it. While we acknowledge the mystery of the incarnation, part of being a spiritual being is learning to embrace the mystery that is God, and especially that part of God that is Jesus Christ.

And the other type of listener that I imagine might be in the house is the non-believer, the one who, when the Gospel was read a moment ago, was politely thinking, "You have got to be kidding me! They actually believe this stuff?"

To them I would say, I know. I understand your inability to not understand. God is mystery. And so is the spiritual life. Walk with us believers, and try to experience what keeps us coming back.

Back to the Gospel reading. In verse 14, John wrote:

¹⁴And 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.

John, the author of those words, was a disciple of Jesus.

- He walked with Jesus firsthand.
- He listened to Jesus' teachings firsthand.
- He saw the miracles of Jesus firsthand.
- He was one of the few disciples that watched the crucifixion and witnessed Jesus taking his last breath.
- He was among the first witnesses to the empty tomb.
- He saw, touched, and ate with, the resurrected Jesus.
- He was a witness to his ascension.

- And he knew Jesus' ongoing presence in his own life and being through the Holy Spirit.

I say all that to add credence to his testimony. He is not re-telling stories he heard. He is telling us about things which he had firsthand eye-witness knowledge of.

So when John wrote,

¹⁴And 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.

he was writing of his own understanding of who Jesus was through his own experience and through divine revelation during Jesus' life and after.

Between Christmas and New Year's Day, Carol and our son, Aaron, and I went to see "A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood," a docu-drama about the true story of the interaction between Fred Rogers, also known as Mr. Rogers, and an investigative journalist by the name of Lloyd Vogel. Have you seen it? I do recommend it.

I will not ruin it for you, but the jaded journalist who is used to doing hard-hitting expose's on corrupt politicians and so forth is assigned to interview Fred Rogers. He didn't want to do it, but eventually acquiesced and in so doing, found out that Fred Rogers the person, really is Mr. Rogers of "Mr. Roger's Neighborhood" the TV show! And his encounter with Mr. Rogers has a profound impact on his life.

And while Fred Rogers was a Presbyterian minister before devoting himself to his TV show, he is not Jesus Christ. And even though the guy was almost too good to be real and true, I believe that he would simply say about himself, that he was simply trying be like Jesus – which might be considered the simple mission of all Christians.

And that brings me back to the beginning, to our Gospel Reading. God saw the deplorable human condition. And though God send leaders to lead the people out of their deplorable condition in the form of the prophets, judges, and kings of the Old Testament, the people chose darkness rather than light, sinfulness over

godliness. And nothing has changed. It's the same today – I dare say, you and I are just the current examples of human sinfulness.

You see, it's true what I tell the children each week in the children's message. God loves us so much that God could not bear to go through eternity without us, so God gave us Jesus to show us how to live a godly life. That's enough for the children. But to you I will tell the rest of the story.

We, human beings, have not been good about learning by Jesus' example. We are still sinners, and our sinfulness separates us from God. And so at the other end of Jesus' earthly life and ministry God gave that Son as a sacrifice for the sins of all.

It's a terrible story. Terrible because we know that it is our complicity with sin that caused his death.

And yet it is also a glorious story. Glorious because through his death and resurrection we have forgiveness of sins. Through the sacrifice of Jesus, God's Son, God worked out our justification. Now we have a chance to enjoy life eternal with God – not because of anything we did, but all because of what God in Christ did for us. And so, you see, we too get "Another Beginning."

And we can know Jesus. In fact, he wants to be known. Because, as John wrote,

¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

That passage is the reason I often refer to Jesus as "God revealed in Jesus Christ".

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

So what is the point of listening to me today? I'm so glad you asked.

The Incarnation of God revealed in Jesus Christ, oddly enough, does not get its own festival day. But it does get the Season of Christmas, only one or two weeks in which we are reminded of the great love God has for us.

The tree might be down and put on the curb, and the nativity set put back in the box for storage, but God revealed in Jesus Christ still seeks to be known by all creation.

The Rev. Duane A. Jesse, Senior Pastor
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Like the wise men's journey we will celebrate on Epiphany, this Monday evening, if we seek him, we will find him, in fact, he wants to be found.

Prayer

Almighty God, you have filled all the earth with the light of your incarnate Word. By your grace empower us to reflect your light in all that we do, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen