

“THE WORD DWELLS AMONG US”

Christmas Day 2011 ~ Union Presbyterian Church , Los Altos, California ~ The Rev. David Moore
Scripture: John 1:1-5 and 14-19

Merry Christmas. God has come to us, remember that. We celebrate this morning the arrival of Jesus, He came from heaven and eternity to live with us, to be with us. We don't have a distant god, or a sleeping god. We worship the eternal God, who created time, who was there in the beginning, will be there at the end of time, but for a while, He came down and was truly one of us. There are tales of other gods who walk among people for a time, tricking the people into thinking they are human, but only one God ever actually became human. Only the real God would have the love it takes to become one of the gang. Not only did He become one of the gang, but we need to remember that Christ was more than human; He was God and will always be God. I have thought for some time that some folks emphasize Jesus' divinity, and some folks emphasize His humanity. Neither is wrong as such, but Jesus was both human and divine. Today as we celebrate Jesus becoming truly human, I would remind us of His divinity.

John 1

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 were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, ‘This was he of whom I said, “he who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.”’) And from his fullness we have all receive grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

Let's pray.

We're going to be going through John for a while, and I thought it might be fun this morning to start where John starts with Jesus. Mark doesn't have any birth narrative at all; Jesus just shows up as an adult, gets baptized by John in the Jordan and we're off into Jesus teaching and healing ministry. Luke and Matthew both have birth stories, but, like I've been saying, with different points of view. And then there is John. John is very different than the other gospels. He starts not with Jesus birth, but at the beginning of time.

This is the beginning of the Gospel according to John. I like John very much. He has a unique perspective, different than the other gospels. This is in part because John, scholars believe, was written later than the other gospels. Mark was likely written earliest, possibly in the 50s. Luke and Matthew were likely written in the 60s and John was written much later, sometime either in the 80s or possibly the 90s, a long time after Jesus death, and well into the start of the church, the worshipping community

John deliberately uses words that remind us of Genesis 1, “in the beginning, God created...” John is telling us that in Christ, there is a re-beginning, a new beginning. Genesis details the guiding of God for the people, the beginning of God's relationship with us humans. In Christ, there is the beginning of a new understanding of God, a new beginning with God. Something new is happening in Christ, John wants us to know. There is a restart of man's relationship with God, and it is going to happen through this Jesus, who was with God in the beginning, and was here with us for a while. This is what I want you to hear, John says.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

Logos, the word. To the Hebrews, a word had power all its own; maybe you've seen Braveheart shouting encouragement and giving strength to the Scots as they were facing the powerful English armies, or in the Lord of the Ring movies where in The Return of the King where the substitute king panics and tells everyone to run and hide, then he is punched by Gandalf who then uses his words to rally the troops as they begin to defend the keep and the people within it. "I don't know what is going to come through that gate, but whatever does, remember you are soldiers of Gondor..."

For the Hebrews, the power of the spoken word was obvious. Words had power, they could do things; encourage, empower, brace, correct, condemn, all sorts of things. Words had power. The British people listened to the words of Churchill, and kept fighting when the situation looked so bleak. In modern times it is less words, and more images that have that sort of power. At this time of year I've been looking online at the most powerful images of the year, but I haven't seen any lists yet of the best quotes, or most moving speeches of 2011.

In Genesis 1 God speaks, the word goes out, and it happens. And God said, Let there be light, let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seeds, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. The word of God makes miracles happen, the word of God creates, the word of God shapes the earth and the universe and every human. The logos, the word, the word of God. This is what John starts with to explain to his readers, both Jewish and Greek, who Jesus is. He is the Word of God. This person is God's action, this is God's love acting toward humanity.

The Greeks also had an understanding of the word Logos, and it was that overall purpose was the Logos, the word, the reason for God. Greek philosophers had noticed that there was a pattern to life, that life certainly could seem chaotic from time to time, but the rain always came down from the sky rather than the reverse, that rivers always flowed the same direction, that trees put out leaves in the Spring and dropped them in the fall. There is an orderly-ness to nature, Logos controlled events, Logos is the order under which nature functioned. It is the power of God, it is the power that sustains and orders the universe. And so John uses both the Hebrew and Greek understanding of this "Logos", and then redefines it in Christ. This is the Logos of God, this baby born in poverty and resting in a food trough. This is the baby who is the power holding all things together and making them ordered. This is the baby who provides purpose, who brings order, who is the power of God to make things happen.

John says to his Greek readers, "For centuries you have been thinking and writing and dreaming about the Logos, the power which made the world, the power which keeps the order of the world, the power by which men think and reason and know, the power by which men come into contact with God. Jesus is that Logos come to earth...that Word, says John, took on flesh and came to earth. Put another way, the mind of God became a person. God is no longer an idea or a concept or a theory, but in Christ, God becomes flesh. Jesus embodies God.

All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

John says, let me make it clear. Jesus is God. All the things God created, in the beginning, all the things now, the heavens, the earth, all that there is, seen and unseen, all that was created was created through Jesus. The birth in the stable is not the beginning of Jesus, He was in the beginning. As far back as you can imagine, at the start of everything, it happened in and through Jesus. That's how important He is. We're talking about a man, but we're also talking about God. The early church took this and made it into a couple of creeds you know...I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His Son our

Lord...and then it becomes very clear that Jesus is God, He is God from God, light from light, begotten not made...Jesus was not created, but doing the creating. Jesus is not a creature, but the Creator.

Let us be very clear. Jesus was God, is God, and always will be. I wonder if John wasn't anticipating some of the controversies in the church, about exactly who Jesus was, and wants us to know very clearly, this is God. He looks like a baby, He does baby things, but this is only because Jesus became truly human in order to reach us, in order to save us. Not only were all things made through Him, but life itself is found in Jesus. Jesus is this life-giving word, all life comes from God, and this was Him. Life is an important theme in John, John wants his readers to have life, 20:31

But these things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

John wants us to have life, and to know that life comes from one place, Jesus. We're going to be going through John for a bit, so watch for John talking about life through the gospel.

Like life, light is also a theme in John. Light and darkness are important themes to John. John's letters near the end of the NT show a lot of thinking about light and darkness, light and the absence of light. In the beginning of Genesis, out of the darkness and chaos, then comes the light, and order starts to emerge. The darkness can be scary, but light banishes those fears. Also, the light exposes evil. Just after the famous John 3:16 verse, verses 3:19-21 talk about how people love the darkness because the darkness does not expose the evil of their deeds, but those who love good love God, whose light exposes their actions as having been done in God.

John of course, knows the whole story of Jesus, and he tells us in the beginning of the gospel, that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. It will seem at times as though the darkness overcomes the light during Jesus' ministry, especially that day on Golgotha, the hill of the cross, when Jesus is nailed in place and begins to die. You'll remember that the sun is blocked out for a number of hours that day. Darkness sure did seem to be winning. But we know the end. Death could not hold Him, He rose, and the light overcame the darkness that Easter morning. And so it does for us; it always seems like a struggle to me, but light always wins. In the very beginning, John is telling us the end. Light wins, Jesus wins, but we know it won't be easy.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Now this Logos we've been hearing about and thinking about, this reason and mind of God, this power of God, becomes enfleshed, embodied. The Word of God comes with flesh on, just like us. He is one of us, but more than that. None of us were with God in the beginning; none of us are the Word of God. But Jesus was. You can understand what John is saying is an amazing, wonderful description of Jesus. John doesn't start with Mary and Joseph, but starts off making sure we all know who Jesus is, and how deeply important He is to the world and to us. Not only that, but He came to us. Eugene Peterson has a great way of putting this idea: The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood. This would have been astounding to the Greeks, and to the Hebrews who read this, and to be honest, it is still astounding to me. That God loves us so much that He came out of Heaven and He put aside His some aspects of His divinity for a bit, and became a human is astounding. He became one of us, and life has never been the same.

This amazing Logos becomes one of us, and then comes to us. Someone once explained it to me like this: if you wanted to get your goldfish to do something that would save their lives, say they had to jump out of the dirty fishbowl and into the clean one right next door, what would be the best way to do that? You could try and herd them, but they might not understand. My goldfish have always been slow on the uptake, and they

have never wanted to do what I wanted them to do. That's why there are those little fishnets. So herding them isn't best. Tell them to do it doesn't work. The best thing would be if I could become a goldfish for a while, tell them in goldfishian that to save their lives they had to jump out of the dirty fishbowl and into a clean one, and then lead them to it.

In a sense, that's what God has done for us. He told us what He wanted, and we were unable to completely fulfill our side of the covenant. He sent prophets to bring us back to Himself, but even that didn't work over the long haul. When it comes to God, we have a short memory, and we lack perseverance. At least, that is true for me. So I understand the need I have to be reminded to come back to God over and over. So He had to come, clothed in flesh, from eternity into time and space that we could understand, so that we might understand Him. We needed Him to come to save us, and He did that the best way possible. He came to us, as one of us, and spoke our language, and communicated to us the need to follow Him so that we might be saved from our dirty fishbowl lives. God Himself moved into the neighborhood.

This is what we celebrate this morning; God did not leave us alone, but came to us. We are reminded that He came once, and that He hasn't left us since. God has come for His precious creation, made Himself available to us, and brought with Him God's glory, the weight of God's presence. God's presence, John says, that we now know is full of grace and truth. God came to us about 2010 years ago, came to us when we didn't deserve it, came to us before we knew how badly we needed Him, came to us when honestly, we stood against Him in defiance. We remember God didn't leave us alone, but He came to us. And that is a reason to celebrate. Merry Christmas.