**Sermon 2/3/19**

**JOHN Chapter 1**

It was a dark and stormy night.                  The wind howled fiercely.

The thunder rumbled ferociously.               Sleet pelted the window panes.

Constant lightning bursts produced frightening images

   on the walls of the little girl's bedroom.

Terrified, the small child raced down the hallway into her mother's bedroom.

She begged to crawl in bed with her mother.

"What is the matter?" Mother asked.

As she wrapped the quilt around the little girl.

"It is dark, and noisy, and scary, in my room," the little girl answered.

"But it is just as dark, and noisy, and scary, here, said her mother.

“I know. But you are here with me. That makes all the difference.”

We live in a world which is often very dark, and very stormy, and very scary.

Jesus came to dwell among us.

He knew his presence with us would make all the difference.

Unless a person communicates to us, in speech or gestures, or facial expressions,

or body language, we can't get to know them.

What goes on behind the mask of skin will always remain a mystery.

God, too, was a mystery until he broke his silence.

He spoke once, long, long ago, and all creation sprang to life –

quasars, oceans, whales, giraffes, orchids, and beetles.

He spoke again and this time the Word took the form of a man, Jesus Christ.

John's Gospel tells the story of the Word who became flesh and lived among us.

God broke the silence and spoke in the only way we could truly understand.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

Jesus the Word.

John used language with special meaning for both Greek and Jewish readers.

In Greek philosophy "word" was a key term,

    often referring to the power of reason undergirding all creation.

For Jews, too, "word" had great significance,

    for God spoke his word to create the world and to transform his people.

Yet John's meaning passed beyond the Greek and Jewish ideas.

An eight-year-old girl expressed it well.

When asked why Jesus was called the Word, she said,

“Because Jesus is all God wanted to say to us.”

The Gospel of John is different from the other Gospels.

It is clear from the first few paragraphs that John broke sharply

   from the style of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

The other Gospel writers focused on events,

     following Jesus through the bustling marketplaces and villages.

Unlike them, John assumed readers knew the basic facts about Jesus.

Instead of focusing on facts, he mulled over the profound meaning

    of what Jesus had said and done.

The book of John reads as if it were written under a great shady tree

     by an author who had lots of time for reflection.

Other Gospels show the disciples dropping their nets and following Jesus instantly.

John describes a more gradual process.

When two of John the Baptist's disciples grew curious,

     Jesus invited them to come and spend a day with him,

    “Come and you will see.”

Soon, they were ready to tell others what they had seen and heard.

In his first sentence, John highlights Christ's nature.

There are no Christmas scenes here: no stables, shepherds, or wisemen.

John tells nothing of Jesus' birth and youth.

He introduces him as the adult Son of God.

After an eloquent prologue, the book shows John the Baptist

     humbly pointing to Jesus,

    “The straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.”

Jesus was sent with a mission. John selected a few scenes in Jesus' life,

    and arranged them so they present a Messiah who knows:

    “where I come from and where I am going.”

Jesus was not simply a "man who fell to earth."

   He is God's Son, sent to do the work of the Father.

   His repeated references to the One "who sent me" give a cadence to the book.

According to John, Christ participated in the original creation act.

But later he was sent to earth as the Word, the sum of all that God wanted to say.

God spoke in the only way we could truly understand: by becoming one of us.

New Christians often turn to the book of John

       because it spells out so clearly the basics of the faith.

Jesus proves who he is, diagnoses humanity's problems,

   and bluntly describes what is necessary for conversion.

John does not primarily relate events; he interprets those events.

The verse, John 3:16, has probably been memorized more than any other in the Bible.

In a few words it tells the story of salvation:

    God's love for the world,

    God's gift of his Son,

    and the opportunity for anyone who believes to be saved.

John frequently records Jesus' use of the words I am:

    I am: the bread of life, the way, the truth, the life,

     The light of the world, the vine.

The phrase stood out sharply to Jewish leaders,

     because God had been known as the great I AM.

Thus in his "I am," statements, Jesus is claiming to be God.

John clearly states the reason why he wrote his book about Jesus:

    "These are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah,

     the Son of God, and through believing you may have life in his name."

John doesn't refer to miracles, he calls the miracles: signs.

A sign points to something.

In John, supernatural acts are one more proof of Jesus' unique nature.

Jesus refused to perform miracles as magic to dazzle the crowds,

     but used them instead as object lessons to teach about himself.

As early as 1690 Uranus had been sighted and was observed for a hundred years.

But there was something puzzling to the astronomers.

The planet seemed to be behaving most peculiarly.

There was a curious eccentric movement for which the astronomers found no cause.

After much thinking, they proposed the existence of another planet,

      then unknown, which was exerting a gravitational pull upon Uranus.

Later, stronger telescopes were constructed and when turned to the sky,

       they showed the sparkling beauty of Neptune.

Thus the seeming eccentricity of Uranus was explained

      by the existence and attractive power of this other great heavenly body.

When Jesus was getting ready to leave for Galilee,

     he found Philip and invited him to follow him.

Philip found Nathanael and told him about Jesus of Nazareth.

But Nathanael wasn't convinced. "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"

Philip simply said "Come and see."

Come and see the God who came.

The first answer given the first doubter is the only one necessary: "Come and see."

Nathanael came. And Nathanael saw. And Nathanael discovered,

       “Teacher, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel.”

By His existence Jesus changed the world.

His power changed how we act and what we do.

Nathanael's question still lingers, even two thousand years later.

Is the life of the young Nazarene really worth considering?

The answer of Philip still suffices. "Come and see."

John's Gospel is an invitation to "Come and See."

It tells the story of the Word who became flesh and lived among us.

When we come to the book of John we discover the story, and

     we encounter the Word who became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

Come and see the rock which has withstood the winds of time.

Come and see the flame which tyrants and despots have not extinguished.

Come and see the passion which oppression has not squelched.

Come and see the hospitals and orphanages rising beside the crumbling ruins

         of evil and atheism.

Come and see the changed lives:

          the alcoholic now dry, the embittered now joyful,

                              the shamed now forgiven, the grieving comforted.

Come and see the marriages rebuilt, the orphans embraced, the imprisoned inspired.

Journey into the jungles and hear the drums beating in praise.

Sneak into the corners of oppression

     and find believers worshiping under threat of death.

Walk on death row and witness the prisoner condemned by man yet liberated by God.

Come and see the pierced hand of God touch the most common heart,

     wipe the tear from the wrinkled face, and forgive the ugliest sin.

Come and see. He avoids no seeker.

Like Nathanael, "Come and see."

And like Nathanael discover the Teacher, who is the son of God' the King of Israel."

AMEN