

“Normal No More”
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St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky
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John 1:1-14

We’ve come a long way in the last ten hours. Just last night, or actually earlier this morning, we were celebrating the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, where he lay as a baby in a manger. Angels sang to humble shepherds, who then went to see Jesus and Mary and Joseph, and after their visit, they went on their way sharing the good news with everyone they met. There’s a charming simplicity about that story, but now on Christmas morning, the Gospel of John takes us in a totally different direction.

John doesn’t tell the story of Jesus’ birth. Instead, Jesus just shows up fully grown at the outset of his mission, recruiting disciples. But before that story starts, John goes way far back beyond the birth of Jesus to before the beginning of time, when the Word of God spoke creation into existence. God said, “Let there be light,” and there it was. That light ripped darkness apart, brought order to chaos, and made life possible. That’s a pretty a stark contrast to last night’s baby in provincial Bethlehem.

It’s not that John denies or rejects the birth story. He simply sees Jesus in a more cosmic light. For John, the Word, the very ordering principal of the creation, was Jesus. All things came into being through him, and without him, nothing can exist. You and I are here literally because Jesus said so, and the only thing between us and oblivion is his voice. Nothing can silence that voice, but the darkness can keep us from listening, so the Word became flesh and dwelt among us to help us see and hear clearly, to overcome the darkness with light so that we might live.

In John's eyes, Jesus became Incarnate to restore order to a chaotic universe, not with coercion or force, but with mercy and peace, and that purpose is most welcome. However you might feel about what's happened this past year, in our nation and our world, it's hard to deny that it's been unusually chaotic. Chaos invades our personal lives, too. What a wild ride it can be, both emotionally and from sheer busyness, especially at this time of year.

Just in the last month, many of us have prepared for travel or shopped for gifts and wrapped them. Many have cooked feasts or gotten ready for family or party guests to arrive, and we've also done some worshipping along the way. A lot of this has been fun, despite the hard work, but for many of us, this is on balance not a joyous season, but chaotic time for our souls, especially for those of us who are grieving loss. This pain is made even sharper by a culture that sells the fake message that everyone should be happy. It's almost foisted on us like an obligation, a civic duty. But the truth is, most of us have mixed feelings of both joy and sadness.

We do feel gratitude for the many blessings we've received, yet also a distinct sense of release and relief as the light at the end of the tunnel appears larger and brighter, and we realize that it's not a train. Life can start return to normal now that this intense season is done. Except that it can't, because the Word has become Incarnate in Jesus, and that changes everything.

When Jesus came, revealing the divine Light, he altered the fundamental relationship between God and us. It takes John the entire remainder of his lengthy, complicated, beautiful Gospel to flesh out how that happens and what that means, but the summation comes in those opening verses. To those who believe, "[H]e gave power to become children of God," and that act of gracious forgiveness and reconciliation, a transformation made possible through Christ's sacrificial love, means that life can no longer be normal.

Living in the light of Christ is wonderful, but that's not to say that life will be easy. Jesus himself endured all of the many distressing experiences that trouble us, except for sin. Yet his life was wonderful. Way back then, and still today, he provokes a sense of awe and wonder and joy that doesn't go away in the tough times, as long as we strive to stand firmly in the light. Nothing can take the light and life of Jesus away from us. The only way we can be separated from Jesus is to stop listening, stop looking, and wander away from our faith, and even then, Jesus persistently calls us back home to the light.

Perhaps even more exciting, the light of Jesus shines through us, when we allow it, piercing the darkness of our world, letting people see the truth, offering guidance for the lost, and the possibility of hope and freedom. God wants us, and the world needs us to be, "sent from God," as John was, "as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him." That may seem impossible, but only if we have forgotten who we are as children of God, heirs of God, empowered by the Spirit to proclaim the good news.

Sometimes, it can be hard to remember or even believe this new, very not normal identity God has conferred upon us by His grace. We're constantly bombarded with messages from the world around us about who we are and who we should be, but just as "the world did not know [Jesus]," many in the world do not know who we are in Christ Jesus – at least not yet. And the world certainly does not have the authority to define who we are. Only God possess that power. As children of God, endowed by the Spirit, there's no going back to normal, because we've come a long way in the last ten hours. Amen.