

“Normal No More”
The Reverend Michael L. Delk
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. Humble shepherds came to see him. The magi, a.k.a., the three kings, won’t arrive until later in Christmastide. There’s just a charming simplicity about that story, in some ways a deceptive simplicity, because Luke gives us so much with so few words. And 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 as a fully grown man at the outset of his mission, recruiting disciples, but before that story begins, John gives us this eloquent, mysterious Prologue, that starts the story “In the beginning,” eons before Jesus’ birth. He writes of how Jesus is the Word, with a capital “W,” referring to the Greek concept of *logos*, the ordering principle of the cosmos. This is 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. Last night was about the humble beginnings on earth. This morning is about the glorious beginning, before earth was even made. In fact, John sees Jesus as that ordering principle, the embodiment of the Word that God spoke in Genesis 1, when whatever God said happened with the power of what is called the performative word. “All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.” Everything we see around us, and much that we can’t, exists because of Jesus.

In John's eyes, Jesus became Incarnate principally to restore order to a chaotic universe, not with coercion or force, but with mercy and peace, and that purpose is most welcome. The preceding month has been, for most of us, a wild ride, with all of preparations for travel, gifts, food, family, parties, and worship. For some of us, these past weeks have proven emotionally difficult for a variety of reasons, and now that it's nearly over we 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 return to normal.

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 meant to be wonderful. This isn't to say that life won't be hard, frustrating, painful, and whole host of other things that we'd rather life not be. Jesus himself endured all of the many distressing experiences that trouble us, except for sin. Yet his life was wonderful. The very presence of Jesus, back then and still today, elicits 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. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." Nothing can take the light and life of Jesus away from us. The only way we can be separated from Jesus

now is to wander away from our faith into the shadows of sin, and when we do, 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, as John was, “sent from God . . . 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.

It can be hard to remember, because we’re constantly bombarded with messages from the world around us about whom we are and who we should be, but just as “the world did not know [Jesus],” the world does not know us and 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.