

Sermon Notes - January 2, 2022

(John 1:6-14 - *with Kathy Winters Alexander*)

Good morning. Here we are - it is January 2nd. We have started a new year which general makes us pause and reflect. We think about what occurred in the previous year, take inventory on our current situation, and look towards the future. We don't just do this once a year - we do it daily and sometimes without knowing. It just seems more symbolic somehow at the beginning of a new year. So, as you can imagine, for several days, I have prayed and written notes preparing this message. I thought, "Well, this shouldn't be too hard. It should be pretty easy, right? Pray for divine inspiration, pick a topic, make a few points, reference scripture, and wrap it up with some closing notes." But, it was harder than you might think - at least it was this week. My thoughts were all over the place. Do we talk about New Year's resolutions -- or maybe reflect on what Advent and Christmas meant to us this year - or talk about the Magi taking another route home and what would have happened had they not? Earlier in the week, it seemed like God was putting our prayer life in my heart; but, last night he directed me and allowed me to focus on the gospel reading.

Now, in the last verse of today's gospel, we learn that Jesus came in human form. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." This was important. **It was another way, a tangible way, for us to know God.** God wasn't speaking on a mountaintop to Moses. He wasn't teaching from written laws. He was God; but, he was a man. That meant the people of that time could see, hear, and touch him. They could walk and talk with him. They could see that Jesus felt all of the same emotions and experiences that we do, and then some - happiness, joy, peace, sadness, grief, anxiety. He knew good days and bad. He knew acceptance and rejection. He received both love and hate from others. He knew triumphs and struggles. He knew what it truly meant to pray and live out God's will and not his own.

I think that what is just important from this passage is to realize that John is fulfilling his calling. He didn't have a lot of power or political

standing, but people came because he spoke the truth. He challenged those who gathered to change their ways – to stop sinning. He baptized them as a sign of their repentance. Even though hundreds may have come to listen, he didn't lose sight of his mission – to announce the coming of Jesus. He didn't get lost in the message or the work. John understood clearly that he was sent to point everyone to Christ, the light of the world – to let everyone know that a Savior was on the way – a man, and yet, at the same time, the divine Son of God. For any that would receive Jesus and believe in his name, they would become children of God -- which in turn promises all a fresh start, a new beginning, and the only source of eternal life. As humans, we like that, don't we – a clean slate to begin again and a chance for eternal life?

Now, just like John, we are not the light; but, we are called to share the Word and reflect that light. God has given each of us a purpose for living and we can trust him to guide us. John had God in the Old Testament to guide him; but, we have God, the entire Bible, and prayer to discover God's Word and the truths that he wants us to know -- to discover and learn the gifts and talents that he has given us and those he wants to teach us. As these truths and gifts work in us and through us, others will be drawn to him. We do this by using the skills that God has given us. We do this by getting out of our comfort zones to learn and share our new abilities. Our gifts and talents are as unique as each of us; but, the question is, "How will you use them?"

You don't have to be in full-time ministry to do God's work. There's plenty you can do to help our friend and sister-in-Christ, Rev. Peggy. Young and old can participate in our Worship services. Anyone can read a scripture or be an acolyte, usher, or greeter. If your legs are too weak, you can sit in a chair or a wheelchair to be an usher or a greeter. If you mispronounce a word or skip a line, who cares? It's okay! You are human. Look to the Bible. How many perfect people did God use? The only perfect being that I found was the Holy Trinity – God, the Father, God, the Son, and God, the Holy Spirit. Look at Moses. He didn't like to speak in public, but God worked with that. Look at David and Paul – not perfect, but were willing to get outside of their box to learn and to follow

God's calling. Now, some were more stubborn and more resistant. Some were stuck in the belly of a whale. Some had to wander around in the desert for forty years -- but, trust and believe, God will get you there!

Be open to his calling. Be open to the lessons. Be open to service:

- As simple as an act of kindness, sharing a smile or an uplifting word, a call or a visit.

Some are given the ability to listen, to cook a meal, or to share joy and laughter with others. Perhaps your gift is prayer. Maybe you're creative with art, quilting or crocheting. Maybe your gift is serving your family, church, or community - up front and out loud or quietly behind the scenes. Some are given the financial means to help others, providing shelter, health services, or food and clothing for those in need. You can serve on a committee, plan events for our congregation and our community; learn something new about how the church operates (for example, how to turn on the lights in the Sanctuary or helping Jeff with the mics or the sound board and video equipment); decorating for various church seasons. You can work for God at your business, at school or at home, with a lot of people or with just a few. Most of us won't be famous, but we all have circles of influence and unique gifts that those in our circle will need.

Take a moment today to thank God for everything that he has given you - all the strengths and characteristics, all the learnings and influence and provisions that are special to you. Ask him to show you how those gifts uniquely qualify you for your purpose and how you can use them to change others' lives in eternity this year. Living your calling and serving others will definitely lead to a more fulfilling year. This is how we bring the Word of Christ alive for others to see. People can still experience the light of Christ through our words and our actions.

So, as we start a new year, I challenge you to seek God, his Word, and reflect his light every day. Be joyful. Have hope, love and laughter even on the tough days. God is faithful and forgiving. He is gracious, good, and kind. He is with us now and in the future that is why and how we

can know his peace and his strength even in stressful times. Hold on to Christ. Let him be your anchor. Let him be the foundation for your hope, peace, and joy. God will sustain us during our struggles; and, in turn, we can help others with theirs. How many burdens can you ease this year? How many hearts can you cheer? How many souls can you help? How will you answer God's calling? God can use you in a way that he can use no one else. Let him know your willingness to follow him.

Jesus came into the world offering us peace and grace, forgiveness and hope, joy, love, and eternal salvation.

Accept it and share it this year.