

Christmass I [C]
St. John 1:1-18
December 30th, 2018
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

The Word

No one has ever seen God...until Jesus came to live among us.
No one ever heard the words of God until Jesus spoke them.
Today, this season, we celebrate God with us. We are not alone. We are not without help. We are most importantly, not without love.

Many say that the church is shrinking and disappearing. Many see that as a judgment upon us. Maybe so. But maybe nothing has changed, and we are rediscovering in another generation what really matters most about our faith in God. Spiritual success has nothing to do with numbers and accomplishments as measured by this world. And measured by these standards, someone who has lived a spiritual life "successfully" (if there is such a thing) might be considered a total failure.

Checkout the words of this morning's Gospel if you think Jesus had a successful ministry:

"He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came unto his own, but his own did not receive him."

No one recognized God in this person of Jesus. Even those who should have known, did not receive Jesus. They were fascinated by the words Jesus spoke, the wisdom with which he answered questions. They may have seen Jesus and the disciples as a sort of traveling magic act, going around healing sick people and performing other miracles before the poor and lower classes of people living around the Galilee. Such people were of no consequence to the people of social standing and wealth and position.

He must have been frustrated; yet, out of love for all of us, he continued his ministry. He persisted in the face of this resistance and apparent failure. No one had seen God, and no one expected to meet him in the person of this itinerant carpenter/preacher.

Today we want to “consume” religion and spirituality like a product. We want to know how religion can help us. We want to feel better spiritually and make some sense of the often- experienced chaos in our lives. Would that it were as simple as so many other things, like taking a pill, doing a treatment, or drinking some potion. Is there a purpose to all of this living? Where can peace be found? These are good questions to ask, but often we are not prepared to answer them. We need to be: both in word and by our deeds.

Baptism had been a regular ritual performed by the Jews, with baptistries in most Jewish homes for this ritual bathing and cleansing. The last prophet of Israel came to bear witness to the coming of God into the world. It was his job to prepare the way, to make straight in the desert a highway for our God. He did so by calling the masses to repentance and asking them to receive a new baptism, a washing clean of the sins of the past. Wash away your worries. Wash away your complaints. Prepare your hearts to receive God when God comes. The same call echoes to our own time and John’s words are as relevant today as they were back then: Prepare to receive God in your heart.

The Beginning of John’s Gospel is a key distillation and statement about what Christians believe about God and this person Jesus. It is like the creed we recite after the sermon, reaffirming our faith in God. Creeds are statements, words about what we have come to know and also believe about God. Perhaps this is among the earliest, and here it is at the opening of John’s Gospel, the Gospel writer considered to be the most spiritual and mystical one of the four writers. The other three were considered evangelists, good news reporters, teachers, and historians.

God is described as a light shining in the darkness, which the darkness could not overcome. For two thousand years the darkness has tried to overcome the light, yet the light of God remains in the darkness. Light leads us on the path back to God. Light shines on the truth about our world and ourselves. It is not a hard, depressing truth, but a hopeful, inward and forward looking truth.

God is described as including the Word, and the Word is inferred to be Jesus, the earthly revelation of God. “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God.” John considers Jesus to be God, and God to be Jesus. There is no difference. The same God who created everything there is, is the same God who visited us in first century Israel in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. We knew of God before this, but we did not know God. The God who came was not the God we expected. “No one has ever seen God,” John writes. “It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made God known.”

I like the words, “close to God’s heart.” Let’s face it, Jesus is as close to the heart of God as you are going to get. “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we beheld God’s glory, the glory of God in the world, full of Grace and Truth.”

There you will find God- in your heart, for that is where God lives.
In the end, there is the Word, and the Word is with God, and the Word is God.
AMEN