

Sermon Christmas Day 2019

December 25, 2019

John 1:1-18

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who has taken our flesh onto Himself and dwelt among us that He might redeem and save us. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson which was previously read.

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.** There He is at the creation: this Word. He's there, He's a part of it. He's integral in it. And if you know that creation, you know what it's talking about. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, then the Spirit was there hovering over the creative waters of the deep. And then what? And then God spoke. And there was that Word. "**Let there be light.**" Yes, let there be light, and what happened? This Word, there, did what it said. It accomplished the very thing spoken, and we learned something about God: He wasn't the problem.

No, in this we understand something about God. We understand that He's made known in what He does. And we see it. And we see the things made. We see the beauty of it, we enjoy the glory of the mountains. We bask in the magnificence of the warm sun by the crystal blue waters of the ocean, feet treading upon the powdery white sand. We marvel at the intricacy of this existence: the uniqueness of every snowflake, the symbiosis of oxygen breathing animals and oxygen expelling plants. We glory in the magnificence of the peace that comes when it all works right.

And this fits what the Scriptures say. This Word there at the creation, spoken and doing, and creating goodness. God seeing the creation and seeing that it's good. It's not only good, it's very good. And no God's not the problem.

But as I say that, we see that this passage doesn't end with those words. This isn't just about the Word who was God being there in that creation. No, there's more. **He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.** He made this world, He was in it, and yet this world didn't know Him. Maybe this God is a problem? Is it the God, the Word, or is it those not knowing?

And we look around and see that this question isn't without precedent. It's not as though this hasn't been asked. Is God the problem? Is it His fault that there's this not knowing? Or look more so. Is it his fault when you see tragedy? After all, there's more to this world than just the beauty of it. It's naïve for us to ignore that, isn't it? There is this darkness that John describes isn't there?

When I was in seminary one of my professors called this the Law found in the mirror of existence. This is what I speak of when I talk about how you all know suffering. This is the experience of this life that you all have. You have it when you're sick. You have it when your

body breaks down in illness and cancer. You have it when you have even aches and pains. Moreover, you have it when you experience the pains and sorrows of losing loved ones and those things that strike us the deepest. Is God the problem in that?

As I said this isn't a question that has been left unasked. Many have presented it and wrestled with it. Think about it. I have mentioned this before, but we look at something like nature. I spoke of its beauty and how we marvel at it. How we look at something like the mountains and their impressive splendor. I have heard so many say that they go somewhere like the mountains, and they have a real sense for the divine. Many even say that they feel they can commune with God in nature, in some sense. I remember someone even telling me a story, when I was talking about the claims that the Christian faith makes in terms of the revelation of God. They said how they were up in the mountains and there was a storm that blew in. There they said they suddenly felt so small, and felt the immensity of God's power. What do we think about God when we're looking at the beauty of this creation, and we see the sweet little bunny come hopping up. But just when we're marveling about how wonderful and peaceful all this is, that bunny is suddenly devoured by the raptor that descends from his perch on high. What do we think of God there? Is this God a problem?

Or as one last example. I read last week an article that was about a man who had been an assassin for the drug cartels in Mexico. The life he spoke of was chilling. He described how he had been recruited and had chosen this life because he saw his father work honestly day in and day out with no real benefit in his view. Upon recruitment, he quickly realized how he would have numb himself utterly to go about the work of killing people. He would have to silence any voice within him that indicated he was doing something wrong. He would have methodically do this work without consideration for the consequences to anyone.

What became most interesting in this story, though, was that the man was ultimately arrested. Realizing his value as a witness, one of the policemen brought him under protective custody—something far less certain in Mexico than here. He also worked and gathered a whole group of witnesses. These witnesses lived in a house together right next to the courthouse where they could easily be transported safely to testify. This program showed great promise for a time. The witnesses did their work, some of the crime was being truly affected. However, the policeman who had orchestrated all of this eventually took a better position. With his departure, everything fell apart. Many of the witnesses fled the house. Most of them returned to crime.

This sadness is our world, this darkness is our world. And so the world asks, is the problem with God?

Well, as we are looking this morning at this Word, this Word who was with God in the beginning, the Word through whom the world was created, the Word who was God. As we look at this Word, we ask what the Word has to say. **“The true light, which gives light to**

**everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.”**

The Word came into the world and the world did not know him. Was the problem with this Word, or with the world that didn't know Him? The problem is with the world, isn't it? The problem is with us. The problem is the darkness of the veil that we have cast over the world with sin, with the death that follows us in sin. The problem is that when we try to say God is the problem, what we're trying to do is excuse ourselves. We're trying to justify how we're not wrong. We're trying to make ourselves out to be innocent bystanders, just trying to do our best, that we never contribute to the problem.

Why? Because when we're confronted with that problem, that we might be the problem, it's scary. This mess of the world that we have is so darkened that we're responsible for assassins for drug cartels. This world is so corrupted that the pains, the aches, the sicknesses and the cancers are our fault—and to be clear I don't mean they're the direct result of some particular thing we've done. Sure there's a correlation with lung cancer and smoking, or a failing liver and drinking, but in general this is all the byproduct of sin, and we deserve it because we are sinners who still sin. That's a scary thought to have to take responsibility for that. Even some atheists recognize how responsibility for a duty to all of humanity weighs on a person. That's where the term existential angst comes from, this fear.

But the scariest thought is what this means in relation to God. If He's not the problem and we are, what does that mean when it comes to dealing with Him? We see the power in the creation. We see how the Word works this power. We can even recognize the smallness of our lives by comparison. But what does this mean if all of that power and majesty should be against us? What does this mean for us? Should the raptor come and devour us, the sudden storm in the mountains be our end?

Thankfully, this power, this majesty isn't the only Word we see—or the only way we know this Word. Thankfully, there's another, a clear revelation of what this means: **And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth... For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.**

This Word became flesh and dwelt among us. I'm hopeful you all know this is describing Christmas. The Word became incarnate, dwelt in flesh, in the meat of skin and muscles, and lived among us. Why? That we could see His glory. Ahh, and what is that?! Grace upon grace, grace and truth, the making known of this God. What is that? It is light coming in the darkness, not to annihilate it for the sake of annihilation, but to rescue out of it. It's this child, this bambino, Jesus, laid in the manger. Not the glory of a palace, but the glory of a humble manger. It's this Jesus growing up and living perfectly according to the

commands because we can't; taking responsibility for us, in our place. We have a duty, and we've failed, but He enters into to accomplish what we can't.

And you see, this glory spoken of here—since we're reading the Gospel of John, we should understand that in that Gospel, the clearest revelation of the glory, the most explicitly manifest form of the Glory—is found on that cross. It's found where the power and majesty of creation is crushed under the weakness of sin. It's found where the perfect one takes onto Himself the darkness of even the assassin that He might break forth as pure light, overcoming that darkness. It's found in the life in the manger in Bethlehem, ended on the hill outside Jerusalem, but taken up again on Easter.

And there is the Word, the revelation: God is not the problem. No, this Word shows Him to be the solution. He is the One who rescues us from the sin that weighs on us, the One who overcomes it, and give us life from its death, the promise of resurrection where the aches pains, sorrows and sickness will be no more. That's what this child brings.

And as I say that we see that even brings it now. Brings it in baptism, in His Supper, in His Word. He brings it to you to encourage you with that light in the midst of the darkness you know. He says to you there: "Look, I'm still not the problem, I'm still the solution. I am the One who has come to you, taken on a body like yours, suffered what you should suffer, but taken it away that you would have my light." That's what He says to you. That's this Word for you.

In fact, this even brings effect now. To be clear, it's not promised that we'll have great showings of this power now. The Church will always look weak. But we'll see some glimpses. For example, as dark as the story of the assassin was, in his time at the safe house he became Christian. In fact, many of the men there did. There was a pastor who mentored them. Sadly, many of them appeared to have fallen away after they left. And we know this happens. But it seems as though the one about whom the article was written didn't. When he left, he made it clear that he wasn't going back to the life he had been in. This was a secular article, so it was a surprise that faith was discussed at all, but with the wholesale change in the man, his ability to see the depth of the Christ child's light and mercy, it seems like He's still the work of the Holy Spirit. And it's that light that we see there, and all the more in this Word made flesh that brings light to our darkness at Christmas. Light found only surely in the Scriptures, but shining forth from there, from the manger of Christ and giving us light now and always. Amen.