

True Light from True Light

Lewinsville Presbyterian Church

John 1:1-14

January 2, 2022

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This will not surprise you, but I didn't come across a single pastor over the course of the last 22 months, who said, you know I really loved leading worship and preaching to an empty sanctuary, trying to figure out where to look – at the camera, at our A/V team, at the empty pews, imagining the people in them. A pastor cannot break the “fourth wall” that separates the actors of a theater or movie performance from the audience because that is not how worship works.

We do it together, and we are still worshipping *together* when you are there and a few of us are here, but the energy of the Spirit we would build from being together in this place now fuels the work of our Spirit-filled imagination. Because as I said so many times during our months of videos, we imagine the Spirit knitting us together right now, in Christ's love and in the worship of God. There is no fourth wall that separates us, because even when we are physically separated, even when we are on screens we are in *this* together, this faith, this community, this life this worship and God is still the recipient of what we do. God is the receiver and partner in our worship and times when we need to only livestream will never change that.

We are in the midst of an Omicron variant surge of cases, we have reached new data points on daily cases, and it seems like Covid has come in or come close to every person and family I have spoken with since school vacation began two weeks ago. Here are some of the most common vocabulary over the past two weeks: exposure, quarantine, isolation dates, symptoms or asymptomatic, Binaxnow, quick vue, flow flex, sold out, PCRs, long lines, waiting on results, contacting close contacts, changed plans.

And underneath all of that vocabulary are these phrases swirling around us:
“but I've been so careful for so long”
“did I put someone at risk?”

“what if this doesn’t end up being like a bad cold for me, or my family or friend or neighbor?”

“will people be angry when I tell them they are a close contact, or when I call to cancel those plans, or when I go ahead with my plans?”

how are we still dealing with this?

I can’t deal with this now, again, and likely for all of us – this is not how we wanted to start 2022.

Those words and phrases are the visible tip of the iceberg of difficult feelings under the surface: frustration, confusion, fear, shame, helplessness, anxiety, exhaustion, discouragement.... The scripture for today, the prologue – the first Chapter of the Gospel of John, has something to say in response to all those other words we’ve got going on, its own vocabulary and phrases and feelings that aren’t really about force meeting force, more about expanding what gets narrowed, a larger, even cosmic perspective on this fixed point of time. John writes this gospel in his fixed point in time, likely sometime between the years 90 and 100, and as this was 60 or 70 years after Jesus’ life in the flesh, there was time for conflict, challenge and difficulty in the Christian community.

And so some phrases swirling around the gospel author John and his community at the time he wrote this Gospel likely were:

“is Jesus really more powerful than the places of darkness in their time?”

“if Jesus has always been God he couldn’t really have been human, and therefore can’t really understand what is hard for us?”

“if he was really human with a body like ours then he couldn’t also have the power and glory that we need to know he has?”

“what about people who think his light should only shine on certain people and not others?”

John does not meet the swirl of questions and doubts in his time with a 5 step exposition proving the rightness of claims about Jesus divinity and humanity, about his existence with God always, even before the creation of the world, about the universal gift of the true light. John is writing into a cascade of words, phrases and feelings among the followers of Jesus in his community in his time, and we read his words, his God-breathed and Spirit inspired – into the cascade of our own this morning, in our church and community, in our time.

In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God. And the prologue continues with poetry, possibly drawn from an early Christian hymn, so it continues with poetry and song to give us a whole new vocabulary: Being, all things, with God, was God, beginning, life, light, shine, believe, testify, true light, everyone, world, receive, power, glory, grace, truth.

A cascade of words with cosmic beauty and eternal power to help calm any others, to overwhelm us with a cosmic vision when ours can't see past this moment. Words that don't chastise us for difficult feelings or point out where our faith is lagging or shame us for loops we have difficulty breaking, Their power is in their beauty, their expansiveness, how they go right to what is tight and heavy and breathe life, right to what is dark and shadowy and radiate light.

Being, all things, with God, was God, beginning, life, light, shine, believe, testify, true light, everyone, world, receive, power, glory, grace, truth. Something feels lighter, looser, just by the beauty of those words.

Yesterday was New Year's Day, the 7th day of the 12 days of Christmas, today is the 8th, and they end this Thursday, January 6th in the celebration of the Epiphany, the manifestation of Christ's light leaving Bethlehem and shining out into the whole world. In 1996, Madeliene L'Engle wrote a book of Christmas reflections called "Winter Song" and included this small poem about the Epiphany.

Unclench your fists
Hold out your hands.
Take mine.
Let us hold each other.
Thus is God's Glory Manifest.

Epiphany, the manifestation of God's presence through Jesus out into the world, light shining everywhere and on everyone, begins simply with an unclenched fist, an invitation to hold less tightly to let go a little bit, as hard as that is – reminds me of Ann Lamott's line, that everything I have ever let go of, has claw marks on it, *maybe I first read this in *Operating Instructions*? Not sure...* and then after you have loosened the grip, the hold out your hands, take mine, and in the holding each other, find God's glory manifest. Revealed. Shared. Lighting through us.

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. The true light, which enlightens everyone, has come into the world. And we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, Full of grace and truth.

Words that enlighten and lighten, lighten the heaviness of all our words of worry, lighten the load of what we carry in this moment. There is beauty and invitation in this vocabulary: it can free us from mind spirals from things that consume us, unstuck us from fixed points and unbind us from fixed thinking. We are here in worship together, that the Word might meet us in this moment and speak to us in poetry of the mystery of God, of things too beautiful for our minds to comprehend, draw us out of ourselves into the realm of Glory, remind us that nothing on this earth lasts forever, the hope and heartbreak found in that truth, show us our place with all things, everyone, the whole world, the kingdom of glory, all that was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, shine true light everywhere, and let us see ourselves and the whole world enlightened by grace and truth. Phrases and feelings that are just the beginning of what we can build together from the gift of the Word, thanks be to God.