

## Lay Preachers' Bulletin – January 2021

*January's lectionary notes have been provided by Br. Jason Carroll, Ministry Developer for the Diocese.*

### **January 3** – Christmas 2

John 1: 1-18

- Known as the “Prologue” of the Gospel of John, this passage lays out several key concepts to our understanding of who Jesus is. These concepts include: 1) The pre-existence and divinity of the Son of God, 2) role of the Son of God in Creation, 3) The coming of the Messiah as the start of a New Creation, and 4) the revelation of Grace and Truth through the Son.
- Jesus is identified by John as the “Word.” In Greek, the term is “logos”, which in the ancient world of the Greek philosophers was the impersonal but rational and reasonable principle that ordered the cosmos. In the OT, the “word” is connected with God’s divine speech to his people, particularly through the Law (Moses) and then through the Prophets. Most scholars see John’s use of the term “logos” to be creating a cross-cultural link so that both Jews and Gentiles would see and hear God’s communication with them in Jesus.
- Much in this passage is centred around the idea of Creation. The opening phrase “In the Beginning” echoes the first lines of Genesis where God creates the universe, and humankind in his Image. In that creation, God uses “words” and speaks the universe into existence, ordering and filling chaos. The Prologue informs us that the “word” of creation, was Jesus, the Son of God, who was “with God” and “was God”, and that “all things were made through him.” The story of creation in Genesis was the story of “life” being brought into existence on earth, and “light” being spoken into darkness, and John says that Jesus the “word” was the source of that light and life. The implication here is that in the beginning God created humankind

through his word, and now a new creation is coming to pass in Jesus.

- The prologue also affirms the incarnation of the Son as a human being, but in the Incarnation, he reveals the nature and character of God – truth & grace. The “word became flesh” is meant to speak directly to the idea that Jesus was human with a human body and nature. But in becoming “flesh” he actually makes God visible to any who look upon him, and what they see is grace and truth.
- The natural tension in this is the question: “How do we respond to seeing God in the ‘flesh’?” The prologue mentions John the Baptist as one who prepared the people to receive Jesus, “bearing witness to the light” as a prophet, and not as the light himself. And those who received the grace and truth of Jesus became “children of God” who were born “of God.” In making himself known and seen, God has made a new humanity who are like him and know him, and who experience grace and truth.

## **January 10** - Baptism of the Lord

Mark 1:4-11

- The Baptism of Jesus is so important that it appears in all four Gospels, and it is generally accepted that it marks the formal beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry. More importantly, with the coming of the Holy Spirit upon him at his Baptism, everything that Jesus does and says in his ministry and saving work should be understood as empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- The word “baptism” comes from the Greek word “*bapto*” (pronounced bap-toe), which simply meant to “dip” or “immerse”. At the time of Jesus, the word was used by Jews to describe the formal cleansing required by the Levitical Law for Temple worship, but also for informal use in daily household worship, and even for ritual cleansing of new converts to Judaism. For John the Baptist, he appears to have adapted the word for his own use in calling for a

Messianic awakening among the people. For John, his prophetic goal was to prepare Israel for the coming of the Messiah by calling his people to repentance, which would be symbolized by the ritual cleansing of sin by immersion in water, specifically the Jordan river. (See also Mt. 3:13-17; Lk 3:7-18; Jn. 1:19-28)

- John's mission here is presented as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in Isa. 40, which is all about God returning to his people. He is the voice crying in the wilderness (note he lives in the wilderness!) that they repent in preparation for the coming of God. However, John understands that there is not only need of repentance of sin, but he also feels that Jesus is bringing more than simply cleansing. When preaching he tells the people that *his* baptism of repentance is only preparation for *another baptism* from Jesus, one where *Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit*. This second kind of baptism is the work of the Messiah, who not only cleanses sin but also brings the Holy Spirit back to the people (Ezek. 36:24-27).
- Mark does not describe the actual baptism, but does describe the scene which follows. The heavens open up to Jesus and he sees the Spirit of God descending upon him like a dove, as well as hearing God affirm his status as the Son, who is the "Beloved". Jesus, then, is the first human, the Son of Man, to experience the return of the Holy Spirit. In terms of his mission, this is a confirmation of Jesus's identity as the Messiah. In Psalm 2:7, the messianic king is referred to as God's "son", and in Isa. 42:1, God "delights" in the Messianic Servant (i.e. is beloved). On a larger scale the divine and triune relationship of God can be seen working in the moment. The Father sends the Spirit to the Son, who is beloved. One of St. Augustine's favorite metaphors for the trinity was Lover (Father) & Beloved (Son) and the Love (Spirit) shared between them.

## January 17 - Epiphany 2

1 Corinthians 6: 12-20

- In this passage Paul is addressing the fact that some of the Corinthians are still engaging in sexual relations with prostitutes, and justifying it with a theology of “freedom” that is a mix of Christian freedom and Greek philosophy. The erroneous theology of the Corinthians was that in Christ they were free in their spirit/soul, and that the body was of no importance or significance, and that they were therefore free to engage in sexual activity with any one they pleased. Paul’s correction is that the body is indeed important and significant, since it is presently empowered by the Holy Spirit and destined for resurrection, and that in both the present and the future it belongs to the Lord.
- The structure of the argument consists of Paul presenting the various theological “slogans” of the Corinthians, and then correcting them with his own “counter” of theological proofs of his own. (Translations largely fail to clearly articulate all the slogans and counter slogans, leading to it being a difficult passage to comprehend.) The “slogans” and “counters” are as follows:
  - v.12: Slogan - “Everything is permissible” and Paul’s Counter - “but not everything is beneficial.” and that “I will not be mastered by anything.” The Corinthians were likely making an argument rooted in the Christian notion that the Law is largely no longer applicable, as opposed to life in the Spirit. Paul’s counter is that although free from the Law, they are not free to sin, and that though they may be free from legal prohibitions, engaging in sexual immorality is neither beneficial and also carries the danger of being enslaved again to sin. (See Romans 6)
  - v. 13: Slogan – “Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will destroy both.” and Pau’s Counter – “The body is for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” and the body will be raised from the dead, not destroyed. The Corinthians had incorrectly denied the importance of the body, thinking it to be

“only matter” which trades in “matter”, and will ultimately be destroyed in death. Paul’s counter is the Christian truth that the body will be resurrected (v.14) and that the body shares in the realities of Christ’s resurrected body. Our present body is destined to be conformed to the Lord, and the Lord is destined to conform his body to ours in the resurrection. (see I Cor. 15)

- v.15-17: The Union of Bodies – The Corinthians incorrectly also assumed (perhaps under gnostic influence) that when two bodies are sexually intimate that there is no real union or connection between the two, since the body is “just physical”. Paul counters this with the believer is a “member” of Christ (i.e. united with him in the body) and that like Adam and Eve were united as “one flesh” (v.16) the believer is united with the prostitute when they engage in sexual intercourse. In other words, the connection between bodies during sexual intercourse is real and that who you unite your bodies with affects your present reality.
- v. 18-20: Slogan – “Every sin a person commits is outside the body” and Paul’s Counter – “Whoever commits sexual immorality sins against their own body.” The Corinthians have been arguing that sin is a matter of the spirit/soul and not the body (i.e. outside it) and Paul’s counter is that when you commit sexual immorality you are defiling the body. The body is a “Temple of the Holy Spirit” (v. 19) and like a temple is defiled by sin, so too the body is defiled by sexual immorality. And more, in the same way that they temple belongs to the deity whom you serve, your body belongs to the Lord, who “bought you with a price.” (v. 20) (i.e. the atonement/crucifixion) Therefore, Paul’s admonition is to “Flee sexual immorality,” (v. 18) and to “honour God with your body.” (v. 20)

## January 24 – Epiphany 3

Mark 1: 14-20

- **CONTEXT:** This passage represents the start of Jesus's ministry in the region of Galilee, prior to moving south in to Judea and Jerusalem where he would be crucified and rise from the dead. The previous passage (v. 1-13) set the stage that Jesus was the Messiah foretold by the prophets, including John the Baptist (the "voice crying in the wilderness") and then in the affirmation of the Father at Jesus baptism (i.e. Jesus is the Beloved Son and Messiah). Further, Jesus is empowered by the Holy Spirit, who falls upon him at his baptism and then leads him into the desert to overcome the temptation of Satan. With his identity established and now prepared by the Holy Spirit for ministry, Jesus begins his public ministry in his home region – Galilee.
- The opening of Jesus ministry has two parts: 1) v. 14-15, a summary of Jesus's "Kingdom" message, and 2) v. 16-20 the call of the first disciples: Peter & Andrew, and James & John.
- The "Kingdom" Message: v.14-15 represents the long recognized summary of Jesus's preaching ministry and the essential contents of the "gospel", which comes from the Greek word which means "Good News". The content of the message contains two claims of a new reality, followed by two expected responses on the part of those who hear the "good news"
  - The claims of the new reality are that 1) the "time is fulfilled", and 2) "the Kingdom of God has come near." Both are deeply rooted in OT expectations of the coming of the Messiah. First, Jesus is the *fulfillment* of the long time of waiting, both for the coming of the Messiah, and for God to finally save his people. And second, with the coming of Jesus, the "Kingdom of God" has come near. That is, God himself has come near (e.g. isa. 46:13, 51:5, 56:1, 60:1-3), and especially the promise of Isa. 40 quoted by Mark (1:2-3), that their God has come to them at last. The language of "kingdom" represents God's sphere of sovereignty, which is now

going to be established by Jesus, and where the People of God will experience God's blessing and peace (shalom).

- The response to the good news is two fold as well, *repentance* and *belief*. First, in response to the "good news" a person ought to repent of one's sins. The word for "repentance" (metanoia) literally means to "change the mind", that is, change one's way of thinking and being to align with that new reality. This includes sorrow for one's sins, but more importantly, *changing* the way one lives. And second, our response to the "good news" should be *faith*. While there are a multitude of considerations about faith/belief, at the heart of it is the concept of trust manifest in relationship. Thus, following repentance our response to the Good News should be to enter into a trusting relationship with God once again.
- Notice that God's saving actions – fulfillment and the kingdom coming near- happen first, and then we respond. We ought not affirm the reverse, where God's forgiveness is only bestowed after repentance and belief. Instead, repentance and belief is the response to blessing and forgiveness *already* offered in the coming of the Kingdom.
- Having summarized the contents of the Gospel message, Mark recounts the first disciples who respond to the message. Two sets of brothers – Peter & Andrew, and James & John – fishing along the shores of Galilee near where Jesus grew up, are the first to hear the Gospel message. When Jesus calls them, they respond appropriately with Faith/Belief in the one giving them the message, and quite shockingly, drop everything (including their livelihoods) to follow Jesus. Importantly, Jesus tells them that they will be joining him in the work of the Gospel, they will now be "fishers of men".

## **January 31** – Epiphany 4

### 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

- **CONTEXT:** This passage represents a shift in the letter where Paul moves to address the issue of eating what he calls “Idol Food.” The discussion is long, a full three chapters, beginning in ch. 8 and going through to 11:1, and Paul addresses the issue from several angles and concerns. The problem was that the Corinthians were treating each other poorly as they argued about whether one was “free” to eat food sacrificed to idols. This food could be found in two contexts, one more disturbing than the other: 1) In the ancient world, almost all meat sold in the marketplace had initially been sacrificed in a temple before being taken to market for sale. Thus, when serving meat purchased at market in one’s home, it was likely sacrificed to an idol, and your guests could be offended or hurt if you insisted they eat it. And 2) Cultic meals in the temple themselves, were regularly attended by most citizens in a city state, and now it appears, by the Corinthian Christians as well, after Paul had left them on their own.
- The crux of the conflict lay in those who argued theologically that an idol was “nothing” and that food offered in temples had no power to harm a person spiritually, as opposed to those who thought that consuming food offered to idols was breaking the commands against idolatry, and felt that it was spiritually harmful to them. The church then was divided into the “strong” who had proper “knowledge” about idols, who continued to serve the meat to their brothers and sisters, and even continued to attend cultic meals, arguing that it was meaningless in their freedom. On the other side of the divide, were the “weak”, who were offended and scandalized when attending meals (many of which were the communion meals) and being forced to abstain from the meal according to their conscience, or worse, were attending cultic meals with “the strong”, and their faith was being challenged as they offered real worship to those idols!

- In I Cor. 8:1-13, Paul summarizes what will be his whole argument, saying that yes, in terms of theology and “knowledge”, the strong are correct that there is only one God, and that idols are nothing, and that the food and cultic festivals are essentially powerless before Christ, who is Lord. **BUT**, Paul argues, we relate to each other *out of love, not knowledge*.
  - v. 1-3: The key for Paul is the “knowledge puffs up”, but “love builds up.” The “strong” Corinthians have become arrogant and heartless in the “knowledge”, where they ought live out of their relationship with God, who knows who they truly are. If they love God, they will “be known” by God (see I Cor. 13:12) and will live in the love they experience, not out of “knowledge.”
  - V. 4-6: Paul begins by agreeing with the “strong”, that they are correct theologically. They are right in asserting “an idol has no real existence”, and that although there are many gods and spiritual powers that exist in the cosmos, there is only one God, who created all things, and one Lord, *through whom* God created all things that exist. Note, this is a profound proof of the divinity of Jesus, for only God creates, and Jesus has been granted the same status as the creator.
  - V. 7-13: Note this passage begins with a strong “however.” That is, in spite of the fact that the “strong” are theologically correct, they have not treated their brothers and sisters with love. Paul warns them that they are a “stumbling block” to the faith of the “weak”, whom they are insisting follow along with their knowledge. If they serve “idol meat” in their homes, they are a stumbling block to the weak because their brothers and sisters are “defiled” by the disrespect of the action.(v. 7, 9) (How many of us have had our faith harmed by a fellow believer who has hurt us?) And worse, if they attend the cultic festivals in a temple, and are seen by a fellow believer who then thinks its appropriate to worship these other gods, you are actually destroying their faith altogether! (v. 10-11) Indeed, by harming your brothers and sisters in such a manner, you have sinned against Christ, who died for them. (v. 11-12)

- Paul's conclusion is that in love, he will take no action that would harm his brother or sister, even if he has the right knowledge. How can we live out this principle with our brothers and sisters?