

Sermon – First Sunday After Christmas – BAPTISM!

*Scripture Texts: Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Psalm 147:13-21; Galatians 3:23-25, 4:4-7; John 1:1-18
Sermon preached at Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Episcopal Church*

Focus Statement: *If we want to know what God is like, we look at Jesus.*

Loving God: May my spoken words be faithful to your written Word, and lead us all to better know the living WORD, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Outline

1. Moments of clarity
 - a. Story of spotting the key step in a mathematical proof
 - i. Could happen while driving or taking a shower or waking up in the night
 - ii. This was never the full picture, and there would always be plenty of work left to do, but it was the key insight that would guide all the remaining work
 - b. I think we all have moments like this – moments of clarity and insight, where we catch a vision of the heart of the matter
 - i. Those who do puzzles know this – there's that moment where it suddenly goes from feeling like there's so much left to do until it feels like the puzzle is almost done and you're figuring out the last pieces easily.
 - ii. Or, maybe you've been locked in an argument with a friend or family member, butting heads and frustrating each other to no end, but then you have a moment of insight, catching glimpse of the compromise that will be the key to resolving the tension.
 - iii. Or, it's like when you go out to hike a mountain, and after hours you break past the tree line and catch a view of the summit. There may still be many steps to go, but you can see the goal – and you start to understand how incredible the view will be from there!
 - c. This, I think, is how we might approach our Gospel passage today, which comes from the first chapter of John's Gospel.
2. John's philosophical treatise
 - a. Now, I'll be the first to admit – this is probably not what you'd expect to find on the first Sunday after Christmas, or even at the beginning of a gospel account.
 - i. If we look at the Gospels, one of these isn't like the others...Mark jumps straight into the action, no Christmas stories at all (but that fits for the breathless Gospel story that Mark tells). Matthew and Luke, almost surely written a bit later, both tell parts of the classic Christmas story; they've taken the time to learn the stories, to interview Mary, maybe even track down the shepherds or the wise men. But John is different.
 - ii. John, it is agreed, is the latest of the Gospels, written after many more years of pondering the life and death and resurrection of Jesus – of worshiping and meditating and trying to identify the key ideas.
 - iii. So, maybe we shouldn't be surprised that John, unlike the other Gospels, begins with this philosophical treatise. "In the beginning was the Word..."

- b. The Logos: “reason, logic, principle, divine order, etc...”
 - i. John’s talking about God creating according to some plan and purpose and logic – “all things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.”
 - ii. Even more, John is personifying this reason or logic, and equating it with God – “and the word was with God and the word was God...” – this is some of the basis for trinitarian language in the Christian tradition.
 - iii. Now, this Word is meant to be light and life for our world – “the life was the light of all people...the true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world...”
- c. Admittedly, this is all pretty heady, and I can understand if some of you are thinking... “Can we just go back to the shepherds and the angels singing gloria?”
- 3. The Word became flesh
 - a. But, there’s a key insight here that we don’t dare miss: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us...”
 - b. The point of all of John’s philosophy comes down to this: that all of the wonder and majesty and order and reason and beauty and logic of God, that people have struggled to make sense of for untold generations, and have fought and died and argued over, all of it is somehow, mysteriously, found in this baby born 2000 years ago, whose birth we are currently celebrating.
 - c. That is the point of John’s philosophical treatise – that is the core insight that he has seen in all his study and reflection: that if we want to know what God is like, then we look at Jesus. “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.”
- 4. *Jesus Showed Us*
 - a. This matters, because we humans have quite the tendency to get things mixed up.
 - i. We have all too often made God into our image, imagining God as a dictator or an authoritarian tyrant, demanding obedience and worship.
 - ii. Or, as hinted at in our reading from Galatians – and even in John’s treatise – we have too often made God a stickler for the rules, as if God’s chief concern is whether we live according to the laws of Moses and embody some kind of idealized holiness.
 - b. But, what we see instead in Jesus is the glory of God, “the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth”.
 - i. God comes to us in Jesus – not in strength, but in vulnerability, embracing the slow processes of growth, of learning, even of struggling with faith – and John insists that God is revealed here!
 - ii. In Jesus, we see God’s love and compassion – that God cares enough for this confused and broken creation to become part of it, that it might be set free through grace and truth.
 - iii. God comes among us, not in blistering power, bending everything to God’s will, but through slow acts of mercy and grace and love that bring healing and transformation.
 - c. This is why, when we baptize a child (like we get to do today!), I always give the family a gift – my favorite kid’s book about faith: *Jesus Showed Us*.

- i. In baptizing Leona, Chelsea and George and their family are committing to those same slow processes that God embraced. Parenting is an endurance sport!
- ii. But, in this, God is revealed! Here, we are celebrating God's love for Leona, that she is a child of God, beautifully and wonderfully made. We aren't saving her, but celebrating that God has already done so.
- iii. And, we are orienting our lives and hers toward God's love and grace, that we and she may be icons of that love, following after Jesus that we too may make God known to the world around us (in our successes AND our failures!).

Amen.