

Incarnational Faith

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I have to admit when I read the gospel text for today I was less than excited. The prologue of John's gospel was ruined for me in my advanced Greek class in college. In my Greek class, I not only had to translate the gospel of John, I also had to translate Gnostic commentaries on certain texts. Gnostics explained the prologue to John's gospel in such a way that I can never read these verses without thinking of their commentary. The Gnostics grouped different words together in relationship to God or the pleroma. It was an extremely painful experience. That being said, I decided to wrestle with the gospel lesson for today.

John's gospel begins differently than any of the synoptics: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Matthew and Luke make it clear that Jesus is God's son at his birth. Mark makes this announcement through John the Baptist at the baptism of Jesus. What makes John's account different is that Jesus is God from the beginning of time.

Jesus – the word of God was with God, and the word was God. So from the very beginning Jesus was the word who created all things and is the light that the darkness has not overcome.

The prologue continues with the testimony of John. We hear again that John came to point to Jesus. He gave witness to the light that was coming and acknowledged that he was not the light.

And now to what I would call the heart of the prologue. We find out that the light/the word came to the world – the world that he created and the world did not know him. He wasn't accepted. Here, unlike any other gospel in its opening narratives, John reminds us of the importance of the babe born in Bethlehem. John reminds us that we need to look at the birth of Jesus, his ministry, death, and resurrection together. We may be tempted to stay in this moment of awe – looking at the newborn Jesus.

John pushes us to a place where we may not want to go at this point. In this Christmas season we rejoice in the birth of the Christ child who gives us hope because of what John reminds us of – the rejection, death, and resurrection of Christ. We are reminded to hold Christmas and Easter together.

Keeping in mind both the Christmas and Easter stories, one of the main themes in the prologue is the incarnation of Jesus. Kimberly Bracken Long describes, "The incarnation – that is, the whole life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is at the very heart of the paschal mystery. This means, then, that we can not celebrate Christmas without having Easter in view...For the wonder of the incarnation is that when the Word becomes flesh, human history is irrevocably changed; the relationship between God and humanity is forever altered."

Long reminds us that the life of Jesus changes things for us. We are given hope in our relationship with God. We know that God dwells with us in our lives.

Jesus came and lived among us. He healed the sick and the suffering. He turned water into wine at the wedding feast. He taught in parables. He died on the cross and was raised from the dead three days later.

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.”

The light reveals God to us. We learn about God as Jesus does ministry and gives his life as the ultimate sacrifice and is raised from the dead. Even though the light/word reveals God there is still a great deal of God that is a mystery for us.

Keeping in mind that John’s prologue asks us to view both the birth of Jesus and the death and resurrection of Jesus together – Christmas and Easter...what does this mean for us?

We have an incarnational faith which means that Jesus comes to us, here in this place and in our lives. Jesus is the living word. He lives among us today.

We meet the Word – we meet Jesus in the reading of scripture and at the table as we celebrate communion. The word is present at the Baptismal Font when we welcome a new member into the body of Christ through Baptism.

We also encounter God in the ordinary day to day tasks of our life. As we care for our children, cook dinner, give good-bye hugs and kisses Jesus is there among us.

We live our life in response to what Jesus has done knowing that he is with us in each and every step we take. Long discusses the aim of the Christian Life. She writes, “It is why we aim to live the Christian life by not only talking about it or thinking about it, but by doing it – why our prayers are not only those of the heart, but those of the hands and feet.”

Knowing that the Word, that Jesus encounters us in our daily lives each and every day we are called to witness to the light through our words and actions. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. The light shines when the homeless are given a warm place to sleep and a meal to eat. The light shines when two or three gather to study God’s word and pray. The light shines when a teenager is asked to join a group at a gathering instead of being off in the corner by themselves. The light shines when food is given to the food pantry or a family or individual.

Jesus is seen not only in the scriptures. He is seen in our words and our actions.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.

