

The Second Sunday of Christmas (John 1:1-18)

Recently, I was visiting someone, and her granddaughter was with her. Her granddaughter told me a story about a contest she and her husband host every year. They are toy store owners in North Bay. Every year they host a community puzzle contest. Teams of four enter the contest. They are all given a never released 500-piece puzzle to complete as fast as possible. I am told the contest has grown to forty teams, the city now helps to sponsor the event, and they have competitors of all ages, and it is competitive! The fastest completion time is 45 minutes. People have kicked team members off their team because they are no help at all. Whatever the case doesn't that sound like fun?

As 2025 has arrived this contest came to mind. We are in a new year and people around the globe are trying to live up to the new year resolutions they have set for themselves. People like us are setting boundaries and new goals trying to put the puzzle pieces of our lives together. We are trying to find light in the darkness of the same old same old. Tomorrow, we recognize the twelfth day of Christmas known as the Epiphany of our Lord. Jan 6 is the day we commemorate the wisemen arriving in Bethlehem. Epiphany is also a word used to describe new beginnings or events or thoughts" that one might have. The word epiphany is also used to describe a new idea or illuminating discovery (like the Star the wisemen followed).

Today's text from John chapter one is important in our lectionary. This text is not only used on this Sunday but is also appointed for Christmas Day services. On Christmas Day it is used to emphasize the incarnation of Jesus.

Today we hear it with the redemption of the world in mind. Listen to the gospel's first five verses.

“In the beginning was the Word (logos or Jesus), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has not been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all humankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. John 1:1-5”

Do you see the connection to Genesis? In the beginning... In Genesis God creates the world. In the gospel of John, we read that Jesus was already with God at the time of creation. God and Jesus were one from the beginning.

Prior to Jesus people followed the Torah and people like Moses. They brought to their believers rules of law. The gospel of John brings to us the promise of grace and truth found through Jesus.

The gospel of John starts with a truth that is as undeniable as it is painful. We are living in a dark world. There is difficulty and challenge and loss in the world. John's first eighteen verses, nearly ooze with that difficult truth, especially poignant at four distinct places:

Verse 5. “The light shines in the darkness.” Yes, there is darkness.

Verse 10 "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him." Oh, the ache of being unrecognized by those whom you birthed.

Verse 11 "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not accept him." And to be rejected by your own people!

Verse 18 "No one has ever seen God..." This truth often invites a palpable sense of God's absence and at times can be too painful to bear.

John tells us the truth about the pain and shame, about loneliness and longing that attend our life in this world. And when we hear that truth, we are often and perhaps surprisingly relieved to hear someone admit it and discover that as hard as the darkness can be, naming it helps define it, even limit it, and often robs it of some of its power.

Even in the darkness there was one man who came to testify to the light. John the Baptist. John is the only one in today's text that points to Jesus. John trusts that the Light of the World will overcome the darkness.

Our hope is grounded in the promise of what the Word, Jesus, brings to us. He is not only sent to be the bearer of rules. He is sent to be the bearer of truth, grace and love. He

brings the truth about darkness, about light. He brings the truth about grace and forgiveness. His life, healing, teaching of others will be one that shares the story of a God who shows grace and is full of love. A difficult and hard love. A giving of his life on the cross kind of love.

We have been shown grace upon grace through Jesus. We were baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and sent his Spirit to enter our lives. We were given his light and invited to let our light shine. We are blessed by this love.

We are blessed enough that we are called to respond. Like John the Baptist we are called to point away from ourselves to the one who is at the centre, the Word, Jesus. Our calling as bearers of God's love is to figure out how we can reach out to others. Can we do this through words or actions; through prayer and worship; or some other means?

In order to complete a puzzle all the pieces need to be together. The Body of Christ is the same. Everyone is needed to complete God's work. We all have a role to play. Help God complete the puzzle today. Amen.