

2 Christmas B

Jeremiah 31:7-14

Ephesians 1:2-24

John 1:1-18

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Grace and peace to you from our newborn Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Gospel of John has such a beautiful, poetic beginning, probably one of my favorite in the scriptures. John does not begin his introduction of Jesus in terms that we might expect. He does not refer to Jesus as a figure of power or authority or even refer to his lineage. He doesn't justify his position with a degree or his existence with a financial statement, but John uses the beauty and depth of poetry to capture what we struggle to explain or understand.

It's difficult for us to grasp it, because we simply do not think like God thinks. Our motivation isn't the same. Our goals are incomparable. And so we are challenged again and again to understand and live God's ways. If this weren't true, then we wouldn't see clashes of power, we wouldn't hear about abusive of authority, there would not be one person hungry, not one person homeless, not one person ill. We wouldn't experience scarcity of resources, or worry about raising a family today... the list goes on.

Which means the first step of faith is to grasp that we are not God, as much as we'd like to be.

The litany of events of 2020, the pandemic, the voices of Black Lives Matter, alongside of pervasive and persistent violence, continuing inequity and poverty and exclusion have not been the source of our troubles, but such things have exposed the sicknesses and brokenness among us; we are hostages not to a virus, but to our own ways of thinking and living that make some less important than others, that disregard Creation, that undermine the very work of faith.

And all of this is precisely why the Word became flesh, why God became one of us – to continually hold up an alternative (which is actually not the best word to use – as if God is an alternative to anything) to our clouded, misguided ways, much like we speak of God being a light in the world, Jesus is a beacon of hope.

And we need hope. If last year taught us anything, it is that we need hope. We are sort of clinging to it as we stare down the New Year with high expectations.

I'm often baffled then at the serendipitous timing of the readings we use in the liturgy and today is a case in point. Using this text at the beginning of our year, this year, is setting a guidepost for the days to come. Like a launching point we

spring from these words into the world and into 2021 knowing that whatever we encounter this new year, God is with us.

Faith then calls us to embrace God's way of living rather than our own. It's not a means to augment what we have accomplished, nor is it an insurance against some peril. We look to Christ as a messenger not just of hope or as an antidote to what ails us, but as an actual agent of change in our messy world. Jesus coming as a baby enables us to look, or rather actually see, God among us. No longer is God an abstract, far-off-heavenly being, but here in bone and blood. The incarnation is significant and immeasurably helpful to us as we take strides away from the world's temptations and seek to embrace this Holy Way. Having an incarnate God enables us to join with God in co-creating the world. As one author, Richard Rohr¹, puts it, it's sort of a 2 step process: *We need to look at Jesus until we can look out at the world with his kind of eyes.* So that helps us to understand the magnitude of an in-person God. It's far easier for us to grasp God when YHWH is like ourselves. But Rohr goes further: *We need to look at Jesus until we can look out at the world with his kind of eyes. The world no longer trusts Christians who "love Jesus" but who do not seem to love anything else.*

How important that statement is. First, we look at Jesus until we "get it," until we are well versed enough, experienced enough, learned enough that, secondly, we can begin to see and do as Christ does. Like a baby learning to walk who holds onto the couch and the coffee table and the wall until their body is coordinated, so too we look to Christ as we mature in faith.

Secondly, and necessarily, faith is never culminated with simply confessing or worshipping or praising Christ as if that is the end point of faith. Keeping our focus on Jesus and ignoring the pain and suffering around us isn't faith at all. Looking only to God or Jesus without action is only idolatry. We must learn to live it, see it, to be part of God's mission and promise to the world.

Fortunately, this isn't as difficult as it might seem. The hallmarks of faith are as simple as they have been for millennia: read the Word of God, pray, worship, give generously, gather, commune. Our National Bishop, Susan Johnson, has encouraged us toward these simple and meaningful means of deepening faith for several years now. If we're waiting for an instant miracle or a bolt of lightning, we could be waiting a long time, but by these measures the slow and steady work of change is manifested in us and if in us then in the world around us.

A new year seems like the perfect starting place, the day we can begin again to change the course of our lives, our decisions, our relationships, our financial outlook, our bad habits, our addictions and it is – but truthfully any day will do. There is no moment like the present one to claim a new beginning. But I guess

¹ Rohr, Richard (2019). *The Universal Christ*. Center for Action and Contemplation, p.32

what I see, is that people of faith, can use this restarting place as a moment to again return to the source of all that we hope for.

With one eye on Jesus we view the world with the other. When we step into the church (even if it's virtual) we prepare ourselves to step out again. As we pray we call to Jesus, but know that we are the hands and feet to accomplish the work.

Be bold in this new year to take a chance on something old, yet new again. Be courageous to view the world through the lens of faith inspired by incarnation. I'm not big on rote memorization, but perhaps this year we ought to memorize:

"In the beginning was the Word, the Word was in God's presence, and the Word was God" (Jn 1: 1)

...and we could easily add, "And God is with us."

Be blessed in this new year as you claim the fullness of faith in you. Amen.