

John the Voice

Preached by Rev. Dr. Jacque Franklin
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The Gospel of John is different than the other gospels.

It reads different.

The Gospel writer John does not start the story of Jesus like Mark, with Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan where the clouds open and a voice is heard saying this is my beloved son...

The story doesn't start like Matthew listing Jesus' genealogy indicating that throughout the generations there was preparation, DNA handed down until the right possible moment to fulfill a prophecy.

The Gospel John doesn't begin like Luke who describes the historical details of the time leading up to the annunciation of a baby to be born to a virgin who shall be called Emmanuel.

No, John is different.

John begins with the beginning.

In the beginning before time before creation was the word...Logos.

Ellen asked me recently, "Where do I come from" Now she is a bit young for Our Whole Lives, human sexuality program at our church. Being my second child I knew enough to get clarification before I went off on some birds and bees lecture.

"Where was I before I was in your belly?" She reiterated.

The only thing I could think of was, "With God."

As I thought more about it...

That's not a question we often ponder.

You hear more of, "where do I go when I die." "So, where are we before... we are?"

Not to get into a theological/political debate about when life begins,

but where were we before we were a twinkle in someone's eye?

Where were we before conception, before we drew our first breath?

John tells us that Jesus was with God. Like a philosophical poem he states it simply, reminding us that in the beginning was the Word...Logos...God spoke

God spoke creation into being.

God spoke Life came into being.

God is heard.

The author describes Life as the Light of all people.

The first thing of creation is light - and the gospel writer identifies Jesus as light to the world.

God is seen.

This gospel writer describes Jesus as God in the flesh. From mystical to the concrete.

From timeless to historical reality.

In flesh bone and blood...

God is felt.

God is heard, seen, and felt...

Athanasius, 4th century Bishop of Alexandria writes, "***Jesus became human that we might become God.***" God manifested God's self by means of a body in order that we could hear, see, and feel God.

Jesus was God's expression of God's self.

Whether we believe this Jesus stuff as metaphor or absolute literal truth

or somewhere in-between ...

it has changed the course of human history and understanding.

Christ reveals to us the God we could not otherwise know.

This Christ reaches beyond our most profound imaginings.

As I think of Christmas and the theme today of sustainable joy my thoughts go to my childhood trips to Grandma's house.

We took the trip many times,

from Cincinnati suburbs to the countryside of Adam's county Ohio where Grandma lived.

Christmas was a special time to visit Grandma's.

The anticipation grew as we packed our things into the car.

The ride was 60 miles, over an hour, which can seem like forever to a little girl.

I watched the sky fill with stars as we drove further from the city lights into the deepness of unlit country roads.

I knew we were almost there when the car turned off the smooth blacktop onto the gravel road.

The gravel made popping sounds as the tires rolled slowly down the lane.

Looking out I'd see the trees arched like arms over the road creating a dark tunnel.

In the tunnel was a deeper darkness as the gravel road dipped beneath the snow covered

branches. Finally we emerged to a stark contrast,
the new fallen snow glistened with captured moon and star shine over the fields on either side.

There at the end of the lane was a farm light high on a pole shining like a beacon ...like some guiding star over Grandma's house.

Grandma's house was an old log house built by Irish homesteader's in the early 1800's.

The cabin long ago had been sided with white clapboard.

On the roof was a pipe chimney smoking with coal burning heat.

Warm yellow light poured from the front window.

I still remember that joy...excitement, and hope of seeing my Grandma.

Inside the toasty old house there was always a cedar tree cut from the woods.

It sat in the far corner decorated with little tin bells, aluminum icicles and handmade ornaments fashioned from paste and construction paper, glitter and crayons.

Popcorn strings with cranberries hung in gentle waves from its straggly branches.

Those memories are strong, vivid.

My Grandma for me was a God expression.

Her home was the place I went for unconditional love, safety.

A place I could cry and vent without judgment.

A place of confession and absolution.

A sacred place.

It still is.

It is a place I sojourn to once a year for wholeness and healing.

Advent for me is like that trip.

Gathering our things and piling into the car, we begin the journey that takes us away from our every day lives on a sojourn.

We travel with expectation and hope.

Entering the darkness of the tree tunnel symbolizes for me that introspective kind of depression.

I realize that Christmas reminds me that celebration can be short lived.

I know this Christmas story!

I know what happens to baby Jesus.

He grows up and is rejected and no one listens to him.

His friends abandon him and he is hung on a cross to die a slow and agonizing death.

What parent among us doesn't look at their newborn and wonder "what have I done bringing you into this dangerous crazy world."

Just when I think the darkest thoughts could turn me away from the trip of faith the car emerges into the light...into the glittering world of snow and Grandma...

Reminding me...once again... that the darkest forces in the world are not finally as powerful as they appear.

That the light and the darkness are not two separate realities but an intimate relatedness ... we need the darkness so that we can recognize the light...

the light shines **in** the darkness.

And the joy I feel is the knowledge that this is not the end of the story.

The trip doesn't end in the ditch in the dark.

The story of Jesus doesn't end on the cross!

It doesn't end in a cold dark tomb!

There is the empty tomb

The hope of Easter Morn

The appearance to the disciples

The promise of the Holy Spirit

Left to us

To continue

To shine

To continue that joy

So that we don't turn back from the journey.

Entering that old house is my concrete experience of God's incarnational love.

God's love with real arms to hold me,

real ears to hear me,

real words and voice to soothe my soul.

John's Gospel is a different gospel.

He writes how John the Voice cries out in the wilderness

He writes how Christ is the life and the light.

He writes how Jesus touched lives, washed feet, held the doubter's hands to his wounds.

And calls us to do the same

To become expressions of God in an incarnational faith

In our words, become John the voice.

In our joy shine like Jesus the light

In our hope sojourn through Advent

Sharing with one another the Incarnational faith of a Grandmother's arms at Christmas.

Amen