

"Grace Upon Grace"

John 1:1-18

4 January, 2009

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 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.

Prayer.

A perfect storm has arisen.
Three characteristics of this day
Requires the serious Christian
To stop, reflect, and to be filled by the Word.

We are waiting.
On this, the eleventh day of Christmas
The season of waiting has ended.
The baby has been born and presented in the Temple.
Gifts have been exchanged,
families have been visited,
and everyone is waiting to head back to school or work.

We are waiting.
The old year has played itself out

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(and not a moment too soon! I might add).
 The ball has dropped in Times Square
 And fireworks around the world proclaim
 That every citizen of the planet is waiting for a better 2009.

We are waiting.
 Today, Word and Table come together
 And drive us to our knees under the weight of grace.
 We contemplate the mystery of the Eucharist.
 Our mind plums deep
 the mystery of John's Incarnation.

Waiting may be an irritant to some
 But, depending upon the circumstances,
 Waiting can bring the blessing of patience and reflection.
 So let us use this perfect storm;
 To bring meaning to our waiting.
 Let us reflect on the significance of this time and these events:
 How it shapes the way we understand God,
 Our relationship to God,
 And our relationship to one another.¹

Who, and what, is this god that we worship?
 John tells us that God is Word, with a capital "W."
 Logos is the Greek,
 And finds its roots in ancient philosophy.
 Logos is the fundamental order of the cosmos,²
 The divine animating principle pervading the universe
 A portion of which every human shares.³
 When John looks to Jesus
 He sees Logos;
 The incarnation
 God embodied in flesh
 Through which all things are made,
 Some of which
 Is given as light to all people.

Consider for a moment the light that is Jesus in your life.

¹ With thanks to Holly Hearon, Professor of New Testament, Christian Theological Seminary
 Indianapolis, IN.

² Heraclitus.

³ Stoic philosophers

What is our relationship to God?

John tells us that when Jesus came as light

The world didn't know him.

He came to his own people and they did not accept him.

We are his people.

We can not walk away from our responsibility

Simply by placing the blame upon the citizens of Nazareth and his family.

We are his people.

We are his family.

It isn't that we reject Jesus;

It is that we don't fully accept him.

We are the ones put into the uncomfortable position of not showing hospitality to God's incarnational gift.

I hate to admit it,

But I think John is right.

Perhaps John knows us better than we even know ourselves.

John sees us whooping it up when times are good

- that is when we walk away from Christ

and, like Peter, deny being a part of his body –

and John sees us slinking back to Christ when the going gets rough

- when want fills the land,

when disease, illness and death threatens to overwhelm us,

and when we have no where else to turn

but to return like the penitent prodigal

to the loving, waiting Father.

John knows our ways,

Because our ways are rooted in the DNA of humanity,

And the only solution is Incarnation.

Consider for a moment how each of us have accepted Jesus as God's incarnational gift.

Now we must ask ourselves, "What is our relationship with one another?"

By some fractional unit

Each of us are privileged to be a member of the community that has received him,

Who believe in his name,

(who believe, that is, in the name of Jesus)

And who have been granted status as children of God.

We are God's children,

Born by the will of God alone, John reports.

Not by the will of man;

Not by the will of the flesh;

But born by the will of God.

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We've been given a gift of grace,
 Not like a cosmic Santa Claus who gives gifts upon gifts,
 Rather, we've been given one gift,
 The gift of Jesus,
 God with us,
 By a God who loves us,
 With the hope that we will be known by the love that He gives us.

It is easy for us to love our friends,
 Even though we sometimes fail at that,
 But it is much harder to love others.
 In ways,
 It is easier to love strangers
 Than it is to love our enemies.
 At least, with a stranger, you're getting off to a fresh start.
 Loving our enemies carries the baggage of past experience and old, festering wounds.
 Being children of a loving God,
 Siblings who share in the gift of Jesus Christ,
 And in whom each of us have been given a portion of His light,
 Receiving Christ
 Means giving our love to those who hurt us most.
 Grace upon grace
 Means that we are committed to working at both:
 Receiving and accepting Christ in our life
 And freely, and lavishly extending the love of Christ
 Beyond our circle of friends
 To all our sisters and brothers on the planet.

Consider for a moment our relationship with one another.

We are waiting,
 And in this time of waiting
 Let us reflect:
 Who and what is our God?
 How are we related to our God?
 And how are we related to one another?
 Consider this, these things
 As you come to the Table of our Lord.
 Amen.

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