

Sunday Dec. 20, 2020
 Lesson 3: Becoming God's Children
 Scripture: John 1: 10-18

Context:

Our new series focuses on God's hope for humanity. For the season of Advent and Christmastide, we will look at "God with us," in scripture. The third lesson comes from the gospel of John, specifically examining John 1: 10-18. Our purpose today is to affirm how God has already made us God's children and how Christ welcomes us into the family of God.

The gospel of John is a book full of the theme of light versus darkness. Our passage today in the first chapter highlights Christ's revelation of how all are part of the family of God. The first opening verses of the gospel act as a prologue with this theme, oscillating between the origins of Jesus and the events in the life of the prophet John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus.¹ The light comes through Christ as the prophet tells others of the good news found in Jesus, the Word become flesh.

The focus of the prologue is to demonstrate who Jesus is as well as to affirm those who believe in Christ. This gospel declares a new epiphany of the God whom no one has ever seen: Jesus Christ has revealed God.² The rest of the gospel of John will go on to defend those who believe in Jesus by describing who he is, repeating his statements, and alluding to the words of the prophets before them. The gospel is written as a defensive understanding of Jesus as the writer seeks to emphasize his divinity.

The gospel is also meant to give those in the Johannine community hope as they continue to worship Jesus and honor him. The testimonies throughout the gospel are to give believers in Jesus assurance of how they have been made full with the gift of the deity.³ "Grace upon grace" is meant to stir the people of God to remember how Jesus is part of the gift begun with the Law given through Moses.

Some of the debates in the early Christian community centered around who was in Christianity and who was outside it. While the book draws lines, in some ways it is more of a record of the struggle between those who acknowledge Jesus as the revealer of God and those who will not.⁴ Even as the struggle continues today, the author declares at every opportunity how God has done and will continue to do something new in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the Word made flesh and will continue to be a part of our lives and experiences today.

¹ Sloyan, Gerard. "John," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 12.

² Ibid., 20.

³ Ibid., 20.

⁴ Ibid., 20.

Application

Today's text is one also found in the lectionary during this season of Advent. John the Baptist plays an important role as the herald of Christ and stresses to the people he is the messenger for the one coming who is even greater than him. When we read this text we receive both a story and poetry. We hear John crying out and we see images of light shining in the darkness.

To see a light in the darkness can always be a welcome view to the eyes. Currently, I serve a rural charge not near a major interstate or highway. Most of the roads to get to cities or other towns must be take by several county roads. For miles, there are at times nothing but fields, forests, or ponds in view. The scenes during the day are beautiful, especially when the sun is out or it is not raining.

However, driving at night can be a bit unsettling. For both seasoned and beginner drivers, the journey is at times pitch black with no lights to guide the road except for the occasional curving road signs. Deer seem to love to gawk by the road almost to taunt you about the idea of flying into the road. When it rains or storms or fog permeates the land, one has to slow their car to a crawl as there is absolutely nothing to distinguish the land from the road. During a clear night, if there are stars or even the bright moon, they might be seen for a minute or two until one comes to the forested sections of the journey.

At this point, I know my way well enough to navigate. Each time I come closer to the lights of the town where I live or my destination, I rejoice. There is light in the darkness.

The experience has helped me to reflect on the joy we find in the season of Advent as we prepare for the birth of Christ. The incarnation, God becoming flesh, is where we celebrate the light coming into the dark world. At times, we may feel like we are on back roads trying to get home, worried about what is around us, not clear of our path. And then each year, we are reminded of Jesus, who came to this earth, experiencing the rejection all humans find in some place and even going through death, one of the greatest mysteries to us.

There are some who might focus on the believers and the children of God aspect of this passage. While studying about being a follower of Jesus is wonderful, I also think there is something to be celebrated in reading how the coming of Christ also revealed the care God has for all God's children. God cared so much by sending God's Son, we see how the family of God is all encompassing and life-giving. Because of Jesus, we have received grace upon grace and been claimed by God. So even when we struggle or doubt or question, the light shines in the darkness even if we have to stumble around a bit to find it.

For those of us who believe, this passage reminds us of the great gift we have in Christ who has brought light into our lives. For those who do not yet believe, this passage reminds us of the persistence of the light found in Christ. And for those believe and yet struggle at times, this passage reminds of how he will still shine even if we have to drive for miles to find the light.

During Advent, we are reminded of how the journey to the manger can be long and hard. We are reminded of how there is a lot of darkness before you get to the light. All have experienced or will experience pain in this life. And yet in the dark of night, a child is born. He has come and is the Word made flesh and no one or no thing will diminish him. The light has come into the world and the darkness shall not overcome it.

What does the term children of God mean to you? Why do you think light imagery is so powerful in conveying who Jesus is in our lives? What is the importance of God coming in the flesh? How do you see the light of Christ shining in your life? What gives you hope in this passage?

Rev. E. Hunter Pugh
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge
PO Box 71
Brantley, AL 36009
Ehpugh413@gmail.com