

Sermon for Sunday, December 14, 2025

John 1:1-18

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Today we begin our reading of the gospel of John. Some have said that the gospel of John is like a swimming pool: safe enough for toddlers to wade about in the shallow end while at the other end deep enough for an elephant to comfortably swim. My task over the next weeks is to draw you deeper into the pool. "Come on in! The water's fine!"

I'm going to introduce this gospel with words written toward the very end of the book. John 21:25 "But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." Why go to the end of the gospel? Because the author affirms the depth and breadth of Jesus' life, actions, and teachings in this remarkable book.

We turn now to the first 18 verses of this gospel. These verses are often called the Prologue. They are a literary masterpiece and worthy of multiple sermons. These verses are an introduction to the entire gospel and establish expectations for what you will see and hear as we move through the book.

"In the beginning" this first phrase in today's reading should resonate with you. "In the beginning" is the opening phrase of the book of Genesis, the story of creation. This gospel opens with these words on purpose so as to instill the idea that "what follows is going to have something to do with creation. God is about creating, about life, about abundant life. [Therefore we can expect that] God is a life-giver at every turn in this story."ⁱ As we read further over the next weeks, you can anticipate that there will be multiple accounts of God's work in the world to create, to bring about life, at times abundant life. This is part of Jesus' mission on earth; part of why God came to earth; part of why God was incarnated (became human) and lived among us.

Verse 1 goes on "was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." These words "reveal where Jesus came from,

his inherent relationship with God, and his identity as God."ⁱⁱ The author's point is very clear: he is writing about Jesus, the incarnation of God here on earth. Jesus was and is the Word, Jesus was and is a part of God, Jesus WAS God: sent to live on earth among humanity. God lived on earth: that God would even consider doing such a thing demonstrates the depth of God's love for creation and ultimately for us. *(Pause)*

The name "John" was a common one. Our reading for today mentions John the Baptizer. As ??? read verse 6, it may have felt out of context or an odd addition to what might be considered a beautiful poem of praise for God. But the addition of this line by the author was done on purpose. The author is "holding together, simultaneously, at every moment, the divine and the human." The mention of John the Baptizer is here to provide witness to Jesus' identity as both truly human and truly God. For the last 2000 years or so, Christians have been trying to grasp that Jesus is both truly and completely human while simultaneously being truly and completely divine. And I am not going to try to explain it to you. This is one place where I stand on faith, on belief that it is so, and let God handle the rest.

As I said earlier, the name "John" was a common one. John the Baptizer was NOT the author of this gospel. It's important to remember that. It also helps to notice that this gospel does not ever label John as "the Baptizer." He is labelled as "a man sent from God" and as such is regarded highly. From the gospel's perspective John the Baptizer was a witness to Jesus' identity and that was his most important task.

We know from the gospel of Luke that John was the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. We are told that when Mary went to visit them Elizabeth's unborn baby "leapt in her womb" as the baby heard Mary's voice and recognized her as the mother of Jesus. This story affirms John's task as a witness to the identity of Jesus as God's son.

Verse 4: the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." Let's think for a moment about the word "overcome" and about the nature of light and darkness. This is a time of the year when the daylight is limited. Sunrise is just after 7:30 and sunset is around 4:30. That's only about 9 hours of actual sunlight and our bodies notice it. I have a memory of shutting off the lights in the office at the parsonage in Lime Springs and it was very dark.

Even then with the door was shut a glimmer of light shone in under the door. It was just enough to help me navigate my way to the light switch. Think about what a difference a glimmer of light under a door or a night light or even a single candle makes in the midst of deep darkness. Just one candle can allow a person to see well enough to walk across a room. The deep darkness that we experience at this time of year does not and cannot overcome even the smallest of candles.

Verse 5 tells us that there is one whose light shone in the darkness. The darkness could not control or overpower or seize it. My friends there is much in our world that is frightening and “dark” just now. But the gospel of John encourages us to remember that darkness does not win out over light. Darkness does not overcome light. Light ALWAYS breaks the darkness, brings hope and encouragement....ALWAYS. Who is the provider of that light? Jesus is.

Jesus is the light of the world. He is the one who came into the world; the one who was life and light for ALL people. He is the one who breaks the darkness. The one who became flesh and lived among us....full of grace and truth. From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace.

ⁱ Lewis, Karoline, *John: A Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentary*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2014. Page 13.

ⁱⁱ Ibid, page 13.

Grace is a word that Christians use often. I define it as “God’s unearned love.” Jesus is the embodiment of grace. “[He] is the fullest expression of everything God provides for those in relationship with God.”ⁱⁱⁱ Grace is God’s total commitment to creation and to the creatures of that creation. The most powerful example of God’s commitment is Jesus’ presence here on earth.

Surprisingly the word “grace” is used just four times in the gospel of John and only in the Prologue; only in these first 18 verses. Commentator Karoline M Lewis maintains that this is because “Once the Word becomes flesh, grace is incarnated in the rest of the Gospel. That is, the entirety of the Gospel will show what grace looks like, tastes like, smells like, sounds like, and feels like.”^{iv} We are going to hear multiple stories of Jesus from John’s gospel over the next eight weeks, stories that will bear witness to God’s life-giving, creative activity in our world. These stories will be stories of grace. These stories will be stories of abundance and inexplicable love. These stories will be stories of Jesus as he lived here on earth.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In the beginning was Jesus. Jesus was with God and Jesus was God. Jesus is still with God. Jesus is God. Jesus will always be with God and Jesus will always be God. That’s the good news for us today. Amen.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, page 18

^{iv} Ibid page 19