

December 9, 2018
A New Hope
John 1:1-14

"In the beginning ..."

With those words we read about God creating the universe and everything in it ... it's an awesome concept to try to wrap our minds around. As we read through Genesis 1, we are not reading a natural science text, we are reading an inspired celebration of the miracle of creation, in all its wonder and glory – and mystery.

*"By the word of the LORD were the heavens made,
their starry host by the breath of his mouth."
(Psalm 33:6)*

"*The Word of the LORD*" by which all this came into being is Jesus. "*In the beginning was the Word.*" Jesus was there. He was not only there "*with God*"; He "*was God.*" As we read through John 1, we are not reading a history text, we are again reading an inspired celebration of the miracle of creation – and the additional miracle of God's incarnation – His coming among us – in all its wonder and glory – and mystery.

"*The Son,*" writes Paul, "*is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together*" (Colossians 1:15-17).

A New Beginning ... or Not

John is deliberately setting up the birth of Jesus as a whole new beginning of things. As we mentioned last week, John is helping us see that significant as God's creation of the universe is, Jesus is even more significant, because He already was God and was with God before creation ever came to be (the mystery of the Trinity). Jesus' coming at Christmas is a reboot of creation. A whole new beginning to the order of things. A whole new start to the relationship of God and His people – us.

"*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (literally "*pitched His tent*" among us) (John 1:14). the God who was, is, and is to come – was/is/will be with us.

It marks an end to an era in which God and people are in darkness, separated by an uncrossable divide, and the dawn of an new age in which we can come directly into God's presence. It marks an end to a night time of fear, guilt, and shame because we all fall short of the glory of God, and the sunrise of an age of mercy, forgiveness, and love.

Christmas is about God loving His world so much that He gives His One and only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16). Everlasting life

is NOT just about life with Jesus after we die (though it includes that). It also means life with Jesus **now** – today and every day, this moment and every moment.

"*God's light came into the world,*" says John, "*but people loved the darkness more than the light ...*" (John 3:19). Most people reject this BIG story of Christmas – of God coming among us – because believing in the reality of Emmanuel, God-with-us, brings us to a place of decision. We have to choose:

- Are we a cosmic coincidence, or are we – as a universe, a planet, a people, a person – the loving creation of a wise and loving Creator?
- Are we willing to believe Christmas is just a sentimental time of good wishes and warm fuzzies, or are we going to contemplate the truth of Jesus as God among us, of His wisdom being divine guidance, of His death as the atonement for our sinfulness, of the hope of life after death?
- Are we going to be people of fear, or are we going to be people of hope who trust in the God who was/is/is to come?

Most of us don't like to make black and white choices – we prefer to sit on the fence. We don't want to commit.

But God does not leave us that wiggle room: it's black or white; darkness or light; "*to all who receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gives the right to become children of God*" (John 1:12) ... or not.

The choices

If we believe Jesus was who He said He was – God Himself come among us – everything does change. How? Think about Bert (who does not believe) and Susie (who does)

1. How we see the world

- ***Without Jesus***, Bert simply asks what he can take from the environment for his use. He will look after our environment but only as it relates to his own survival.
- ***With Jesus***, Susie pauses in awe and wonder – and worship. She sees the natural around her not as some cosmic accident or the logical consequence of a callous process of natural selection ... the creation around us is the purposeful masterpiece of a loving master Artist. ***With Jesus***, Susie asks, Lord, what is your will, here? She's see God's will as His creation brought back into harmony with His original loving purpose and design. So she cares for His creation, because it is ***His*** creation. She invites people to meet Jesus. This is all part of her worship.

2. How we see people

- ***Without Jesus***, Bert sees no logical moral basis for values like love, friendship, cooperation, community, honesty, trustworthiness, faithfulness, compassion, etc. – his concern is HIMSELF and HIS survival, first and foremost. If some of those virtues help him thrive – great. But if they cost him – anything – they are bad. If he has to hurt others to get what he wants, that's life. After all, other people have

no real intrinsic value – they are simply random (relatively worthless) collections of molecules formed in response to natural genetic processes.

- But **with Jesus**, Susie sees herself as part of a global community of people – each created by God, in the image of God. She sees her world as a cornucopia of wonderful diverse cultures and communities who are all loved by God, just as much as she is. She sees the pain and suffering of God’s children – her brothers and sisters – and her heart breaks for them. So she reaches out in love – with prayer, compassion, care, generosity, and love – even though it costs her and does NOT serve her self-interests – because that is what Jesus did and still does.

3. How we see ourselves

- **Without God**, Bert’s life is basically pointless. He is just an accident. For a period of years, his systems work; then they wear out and die. He has no bigger purpose. He has no value. His goal is to survive – as best as he can, as long as he can. When life gets painful, why not end it early? There is no reason not to. When he dies, who cares? There is no hope, purpose, or reason to go on.
- But **with God**, Susie knows each of us is a "*child of God*" created "*in the image of God.*" We are not accidents. "*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,*" says the Lord. God loves each person – He loves Susie – He loves you. Each of us is divinely designed and divinely created. We each have a divine purpose – to "*love the Lord our God with all our hearts, minds, soul, and strength*" and "*love our neighbour as ourselves.*" To put it another way, we are to "*act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.*" God is on a mission to save and reclaim His creation – and He calls us to be His partners, using our talents, gifts, abilities, and resources to serve Him. There is a bigger purpose. There is hope.
 - Susie knows her body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? How then should she care for it?
 - In terms of her relationships, Susie knows her friends, coworkers, parents, children, neighbours are creations of a loving God, beloved by their heavenly Father. How does that change the way she relates to other people?
 - In terms of her work, Susie knows her primary purpose is to serve God. Everything she does in life is part of her spiritual act of worship. How does this affect how she works? Goes to school?
 - Susie has discovered that her deepest joy comes from blessing others and sharing God’s love, in the name of Jesus. How then does she live?

4. How we see eternity

- **Without God**, Bert’s life is rather bleak: before birth there was nothing; death is the end. You die. Earth to earth. Dust to dust. Ashes to ashes. That’s it.
- **With God**, Susie is beginning to appreciate her life is part of a divine story, that began "*in the beginning*" of creation, continues through "*in the new beginning*" of God coming among us in Jesus, and continues further "*into the yet-to-come new beginning*" of being with Jesus, forever. In the meantime, there is hope. There is meaning. There is purpose. Whatever she is doing, she sees herself as being

about our Father's business, caring for this hurting world, bringing the good news of God's love – and being the good news of God's love.

Our culture doesn't want to know about a God who brings this new understanding of life, the universe, and everything. Christmas as nostalgia: that's fine, it's part of the old world that makes us feel at home – it threatens no-one. Christmas as shopping bonanza: that's fine, too, because again we get sucked into the old order of getting and spending – it threatens no-one. Christmas as family time – that's OK – it threatens no-one.

But Christmas as the living God doing a new thing under the nose of Herod, doing a new thing within the life of Mary, and even doing a new thing within our own hearts and lives: that is threatening. Jesus threatens everything. Susie, subversively, by living for Jesus and with Jesus, threatens everything – by making it so much better.

"The Word became flesh and lived among us"

"The Word became flesh and lived among us," says John. Jesus – the God who was, is, and is to come – was/is/will be with us. It's a statement of a whole new world. A whole new order of things. In which the world has value. In which all people have value. In which each person – you and I – have value. A world in which God's creation has value. But it also threatens the foundations of a world based on fear, greed, money, and self-interest.

"The Word became flesh and lived among us." Jesus – the God who was, is, and is to come – was/is/will be with us. That is what we celebrate today: the new reality which leaves us out of sync with the old way of just getting and grasping for a few short years. We (hopefully) have a vision of hope, peace, joy, and love in which all people know God's love, are treated with dignity, and are cared for with compassion and justice. It's a way of living that challenges a politics of fear, division, and self-interest with radical love, compassion, grace, and mercy.

"The word became flesh and lived among us ... in him is life, and that life is the light of all people. The true light that gives light to everyone has come into the world. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it ... He is in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world does not recognize him." Jesus – the God who was, is, and is to come – was/is/will be with us. The world CAN see Him, as we live out His truth and His way. Are we living in such a way the world knows we are Christians by our love? Are willing to be a threat to the powers of greed, hatred, and fear by living as people of blessing, love, and mercy?

"The word became flesh and lived among us ... Yet to all who do receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gives the right to become children of God ..." Will you receive Him?

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