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John 1: 1-18  
The Good News of Jesus

## John 1:1-18

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

### The Word Became Flesh

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life,[a] and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the

light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.[b]

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own,[c] and his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,[d] full of grace and truth. 15 (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.' ") 16 From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.[e] 17 The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and

truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who[f] is close to the Father's heart,[g] who has made him known. (This is the Word of the Lord)

Prayer...

Today, we begin a new summer sermon series on the Gospel of John. Why, the Gospel of John? One reason is that John's Gospel is my favorite book of the Bible. The other reason is that there is nothing more inspiring than exploring the stories of Jesus and John's Gospel is written in a way to convince us as readers to become followers of Jesus. John's Gospel is filled with the message of the Good news of Jesus Christ.

Our passage this morning is the introduction to our book. It describes the incarnation of Jesus. Our text starts with the words, "In the beginning was the word and the word was God and the was with God."

Here, the writer of the Gospel of John is reminding his readers of the story of Creation where God spoke and created the Cosmos. Let me read a little summary on what the word represents from theologian NT Wright. This is from his For Everyone Commentary series-

NT Wright: For Everyone Commentary Series- Wright says...

“In the Old Testament, God regularly acts by means of his ‘word’.

What he says, happens – in Genesis itself, and regularly thereafter.

‘By the word of the Lord’, says the psalm, ‘the heavens were made’

(33:6). God’s word is the one thing that will last, even though people

and plants wither and die (Isaiah 40:6-8); God’s word will go out of

his mouth and bring life, healing and hope to Israel and the whole

creation (Isaiah 55:10-11). That’s part of what lies behind John’s

choice of ‘Word’ here, as a way of telling us who Jesus really is.

John probably expects some readers to see that this opening

passage says, about Jesus himself, what some writers had said

about 'Wisdom'. Many Jewish teachers had grappled with the age-old questions:

How can the one true God be both different from the world and active within the world?

How can he be remote, holy and detached, and also intimately present?

Some had already spoken of the 'word' and 'wisdom' as ways of answering these questions. Some had already combined them within the belief that the one true God had promised to place his own 'presence' within the Temple in Jerusalem. Others saw them enshrined in the Jewish law, the Torah. All of this, as we shall see, is present in John's mind when he writes of God's 'Word'.

But the idea of the Word would also make some of his readers think of ideas that Greek philosophers had discussed. Some of these philosophers' spoke of the 'word' as a kind of principle of rationality, lying deep within the whole cosmos and within all human beings. Get in touch with this principle, they said, and your life will find its true meaning. Well, maybe, John is saying to them; but the Word isn't an abstract principle, it's a person. And I'm going to introduce you to him." Those are some thoughts from NT Wright.

The heart of our passage today is the profound teaching that the eternal God, the Logos, the divine presence of wisdom, took on human flesh and became one of us to reveal who God really is. In Jesus we see more fully than history had ever witnessed before that God is loving, that God is good, that God is the great I AM who is truly worthy of our love and friendship.

The Gospel of John presents what theologians describe as a high Christology. Jesus is presented as fully divine even as he is fully

human. Many scholars believe that Mark's Gospel as well as Matthew and Luke focus more on the humanity of Jesus as a Holy Spirit empowered prophet, while John clearly identifies Jesus as a full member of the Holy Trinity who was entirely divine in essence. The combination of the understanding of Jesus in the four gospels eventually led to the clear description of Jesus in the early church as fully God and fully human. This was particularly clarified in the Nicene Creed, which was written by the Council of Nicea in 325 CE with the encouragement of Constantine, who was seeking to bring unity of theology within the early church.

I want to share why I have a special attraction to John's Gospel.

When I was a senior at Whitworth College I took a class on John's Gospel from Dr. Dale Bruner. Dale had a wonderful way of teaching Scripture. He would read the John's Gospel in the original Koine Greek and then he would translate it into English. Then he would recite from memory his personal translation. He also would make

little stick drawings of stories in John's Gospel. What made Dale such a wonderful Bible teacher was also his deep love of Jesus. He attended Hollywood Presbyterian Church as a teenager and developed a heart for mission from his mentor Henrietta Meers, who led a huge ministry of youth that studied Scripture together and emphasized the need to spread the good news of Jesus throughout the nations. Dale and his wife Kathy spent some time as missionaries in the Phillipines out of their desire to spread the Gospel. Dale never thought of himself as a great missionary, but he became a great teacher of the Gospels.

Taking the Gospel of John class with Dale Bruner might have been my favorite experience as a student at Whitworth. Not only did I fall more in love with John's Gospel in his class, but more importantly I fell more in love with Jesus. ( Story of getting a 98 in his class)

As I was preparing this sermon, I decided to see if I could find a recording of Dale Bruner teaching on John 1 and sure enough I found

a teaching on our very passage recorded in 2006 at a conference at Calvin College. One verse Dale particularly highlights in his lecture is the great verse of our passage. The great verse according to Dale is

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,[d] full of grace and truth. Dale explains, "The universal became local, the transnational became a Jew, the invisible became visible, the abstract became complete, and the word became flesh. Eugene Peterson says it this way... God moved into the neighborhood." Dale says his favorite verse in our passage, "God nobody has ever seen, but the very heart of the Father, Jesus made him known. According to Dale's understanding, Jesus is the exegesis of God. Jesus is the autobiography of God. 18 No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who[f] is close to the Father's heart,[g] who has made him known.

The purpose of John's Gospel is actually mentioned at the end of the book. John writes in John 20: 30-31, 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.\*

The writer of John's Gospel wants us to explore this book with the purpose of growing in our belief in Jesus as the Son of God and that through a belief in him we may have life in him. The purpose of this book is to help us experience eternal life both in the present moment and for all eternity.

My prayer is that as we explore this Gospel together, the life of Jesus will even more fully engage our church community and we will desire to spread the love of Jesus more fully in this world. We are invited through our opening prologue of John's Gospel to embrace the truth that Jesus is the incarnation of God, God who came in

human flesh to be the autobiography of God. We are to deepen our relationship with Jesus, choose to follow him above all else, and then spread his love with the world.

In just a moment, we are going to sing the hymn, “I have decided to follow Jesus.” You may or may not remember that this hymn was inspired by the sacrifice of Christians in India who have experienced persecution for believing in Jesus. Here is the story of this song written out by a pastor inspired by this song.

“The church of India has a long, rich history of overcoming persecution... It was in the mid-1800s when a family was led to Christ through the labor of Scottish missionary William Cowan. He served in India from 1866 until his death in 1902. He was an evangelist, preaching the gospel wherever he went, planting many churches. He was an educator who built many schools and empowered so many families through literacy programs. He was also a reformer and introduced much of Northeast India to hygiene

and better health. He was a true demonstration of how the power of the gospel can affect and influence an entire culture.

Cowan was not warmly received when he first arrived in Assam, India. The language barrier was just one of the many challenges he faced, yet he felt called to share the hope of the gospel with the Naga people group. He painstakingly learned the local language. He was able to teach the villagers agriculture, and he even used scripture and the parables of Christ to reinforce spiritual truths. It would not be long before he planted his first church among the villagers, and many began to experience faith in Christ.

One of his converts would face severe persecution that would ultimately cost him his life, yet little did he know that his stand for Christ would change the world. History does not tell us his name, but be assured, heaven knows his name, for it is recorded in the

Lamb's Book of Life. As the story goes, he and his family were brought before the tribal leadership. They were angry that the gospel was spreading. They threatened him and his family and demanded that they renounce their faith. Remaining resolute, he famously responded, "I have decided to follow Jesus." The tribal people martyred his wife first, and it is said that it is where the line, "Though none go with me, still I will follow," came from. This faithful Christian would eventually lose his own life and pay the ultimate price for following Jesus. Christ said, "If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first" (John 15:18).

This song was given to us by the church of India. What a great gift they have given the body of Christ. It was translated into English in the 1960s, and over time, it has been translated into numerous languages. Now that you know the story behind the song, ponder afresh these timeless words:

I Have Decided to Follow Jesus

I have decided to follow Jesus;

I have decided to follow Jesus;

I have decided to follow Jesus;

No turning back, no turning back.

Tho' none go with me, Still I will follow,

Tho' none go with me, Still I will follow,

Tho' none go with me, Still I will follow;

No turning back, no turning back.

My cross I'll carry, till I see Jesus;

My cross I'll carry till I see Jesus,

My cross I'll carry till I see Jesus;

No turning back, No turning back.

The world behind me, the cross before me,

The world behind me, the cross before me;

The world behind me, the cross before me;

No turning back, no turning back.

Now I invite you to do more than ponder. Pray for the suffering Church. Today, the church of India still faces persecution, especially in the north of the country. Weeks before my visit to India, numerous churches were burnt to the ground in the northeast part of the country. Christians who live in countries that are hostile to the gospel or face restrictive governments need our love, prayers, and support. Hebrews 13:3 reminds us to,

“Remember those in prison, as if you were there yourself.

Remember also those being mistreated, as if you felt their pain in your own bodies.”