

Advent Peace

December 19, 2010
John 1: 1 – 5, 14

Reverend Heather Miner

Four Sundays and this is the Sunday that we chose “peace” as the topic. Our joyous music this morning, at times, will seem to be anything but peaceful! No solo harpist on this day! We have horns and percussion and a choir singing with their fullest voice. There’s no room in the chancel for anything else! We all stand, we all sing, we blow our flookfoovers we bang our tartookas we blow our whohoopers we bang our gardookas.

There will be no sleeping in heavenly peace this morning! Peace may be the picture of a calm ocean at sunset, but it can also be the eye in the storm, the only light in a whirling darkness.

McCullough’s cantata, the music we are about to hear, is more aligned with the latter. Into the storm of triumphant horns enters in the second movement—slow, quiet, mysterious: “the word has become flesh and dwelled among us and we have seen his glory.”

The words are from John’s gospel. In this gospel --which was written last but well within the generation that came after Jesus--Jesus is described as the word, the Logos, the creating force of the universe. Understand that the author is not just one individual writing a story about Jesus, but rather represents a group of followers of Jesus. They, who had a generation to ponder the meaning of Jesus’ birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection, came to the amazing conclusion that Jesus is the Logos, the Word--God.

Kathryn Tanner in her book *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity* asks us to consider this... does what Jesus did justify the claim of divinity? That is, can only one who was God have lived such a life?

Those who saw from John’s perspective answer with an emphatic yes. They didn’t have a council of Chalcedon telling them what to believe. They didn’t have “orthodoxy”. But they had this Jesus who, even though not there in the flesh anymore, continued to break into their lives and, as they say, gave them life... a life that was a light to all people, no matter who they were... it is the same life that spoke to Peter “feed my sheep” after Peter had denied Jesus 3 times; it is the same life who met a woman at a well who had hidden her struggles with relationships who, afterwards, somehow went out confessing joyfully “he knew everything I had ever did;” it is the same

life that cried when he heard Lazarus had died; it is the same life that gave Lazarus back his life.

The faith found in the gospel of John does not choose to whisper behind closed doors, but shouts out to all “Behold, he comes to save us!”

In the wake of such a faith, left behind is the idea that God doesn’t care...that idea that God started the universe and then receded into some distant place where only the holiest of people can go. I’ve been reminded of a group of early Christians called the Gnostics in a series of lectures by Luke Timothy Johnson, the man who wrote the introduction to the New Testament used in my seminary. Just an aside, it is a good illustration of the type of path those who attend this church are on, when the class which consists of mostly our elders is watching challenging lectures given by a New Testament professor!

The Gnostics were people who believed that there was available to just a few a gnosis—gnosis is Greek for knowledge-- a special kind of knowledge that allowed them to enter into the heavenly realm. Only a few could enter in. The masses were left out of this spiritual life. Gnosticism was an active system of belief in the time when John’s gospel was being written. But the community of John understood something very different. They believed God made a choice to give to us, all of us who dare believe what the gospel is saying, not only life--but that which gives life.

However you’ve worked out God’s ways in your mind, I suspect what you seek is more connection with that divine life-giving force. Probably, you want more light in your life, the kind of light that overcomes the darkness. Be warned, in our need it is easy to take hold of the wrong things.

Imagine a grown up being in a room which is filled with all the trappings of this life. The first step she falls over her unmet needs of childhood, fears that persist. In the next step, perhaps it is a he, he falls over dreams that are no more. In the next step, she falls over all those she’s lost for no good reason. And, in the next step, he falls over responsibilities he can never meet. On and on they go in the darkness. A thought enters in... a flashlight? They grope around and when they finally find it, they turn it on expecting to finally see, and nothing happens. The

battery has run out of power.

So much of our lives is spent reaching for the flashlight whose batteries have leaked long ago. What we reach for can no longer give us light; it can no longer show us the way. Sometimes we reach for a broken image of God and feel the full judgment and guilt of the God we had to leave long ago. Sometimes we reach for a broken image of those we love...they who can't love completely. Sometimes we reach for a broken image of ourselves, who we are supposed to be, and never can be.

We believe those around us can change if we just say or do the right thing at the right time; we believe we have power and wisdom to make the world into a place of peace.

Bah humbug, not on our own we don't.

Why are these myths of human power easier to believe than God wanting to give all of God's self to us in Jesus? God is the greatest of all gift-givers! It is God's giving that allows us to say and do the right thing at the right time. It is God's giving that allows us to have a bit of wisdom, when our feisty nature is stirred, to find a way of peace. It is God's giving that gave us Jesus. We don't have to fumble around in the darkness trying to find the light, the light can find, the light has found us!

You know it...the Word has spoken to you. Sure it sounded like your own voice, like your own conscience, but it is that voice which sent you in the right direction when you were finally willing to follow. It is that voice that tells you that you are loveable; even more than that, that you are beloved. It is that voice that gives you the courage to take the big risk, to faithfully walk into the storm knowing that it is what you are called to do, knowing you are in the hands of the one who gives life.

The word was with God, the word was God, the word brought all into being, the word became flesh. How do we know it is a voice from God and not a voice of our own making? It fits what we know about Jesus. Does the word you hear forgive? Does the word you hear allow you to make friends with your past? Does the word you hear cry when another suffers loss? Does the word you hear bring life?

The more you know of Jesus, the more the word lives inside your innermost soul, the more you will say with the people of faith: "We have seen his glory!" We have seen his glory!

Then...rise and shine, for the life that was light to all people...has come!

John 1:1-5, 14

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.

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.