

Easter VII Year A

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. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. 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.

Throughout the Sundays of Easter and during much of Lent, we have been reading from the gospel of John....John makes some other appearances in the lectionary, our three year cycle of readings from scripture, but after next Sunday, the feast of the Pentecost, since we are in year A (Matthew's year), we will be reading from Matthew all the way until we reach the church new year of Advent which begins at the end of November....So as we say goodbye to John for a while I thought it might be helpful for us to summarize the main issues in this gospel....collect as it were what overarching message(s) this enigmatic writer or writers, many scholars say writers...plural, that this text is a collaborative one....so as we say good bye to John for a while let's recollect the principal emphases of this text.

I just read from the familiar prologue of John's gospel which is very unlike the beginnings of the historical narratives of the other three gospels... We hear John's prologue during Christmastide....but I think we're all so worn out by then that the words fly over our heads....this isn't historical narrative at all....this is pure cosmology....a treatise as to the nature of the universe....this is the big picture as to the meaning of Jesus of Nazareth... this is a profound philosophical and theological treatise about the person of the Christ....and the claims are frankly audacious and astounding....even modern day Christianity as a whole doesn't buy into John's theology... other than picking and choosing a few isolated passages.

Beginnings are important to us....birthdays, anniversaries, the founding of churches and institutions, beginning a new phase of life... scientists lose lots of sleep pondering the beginnings of the universe....so here John is doing the same thing.....making a passionate speculation as to the beginning of time and space....the theological big bang as it were....He makes the claim that this person of Jesus is the Word, the beginning word, the Logos, and that this Word is God, Godself....stunning then as now.... now a little background as to the word logos....for Heraclitus, a sixth century B.C.E. Greek philosopher...the Logos was the permeating reason, the permeating order and beauty of the world...for him the entire pantheon of the gods of Greece were all part of the overall principal of logos... word...word meaning, truth, enlightenment, the way things are made, the way things work...in heaven and in earth alike...the Word one mystical order humming in a gracious harmony, the harmony of the Logos....For Greek speaking Jewish scholars the logos was also likened to the figure of Wisdom...the Hebrew goddess who created the world as God's master builder...and nurtured that world...and called that world to account....Now I get jazzed about this and could go on and on...and of course there are many books on the subject, so I'll stop....but the important point the writer is making is that Jesus and the knowledge of Jesus is the essence of what the world is created to be....the creative principle of the universe that without whom nothing would exist...again, big bang theology.....God the beginning, word the beginning, Christ the beginning...This is stunningly audacious material then and now...If the other gospel writers ever saw this text, which they probably didn't because John is so late, It is no telling what they would have thought....I wonder what Jesus would have thought!?!.... "who do you say that I am? You remember He asked Peter in Matthew.... answer according to John: the permeating truth and mystery of the universe....you are God in short....the *blank* you say... Jesus would probably have said, expletive deleted.

Then the prologue becomes even more audacious....that this Jesus who is the permeating light, the truth and the very life of the world is the same as the light of humankind....John is all in here....If he hasn't challenged orthodoxy enough by saying the Logos, the word, the Christ and God are all the same....then to say that the light of humankind is the same is quite the icing on the heretical cake.....We can begin to see why this gospel barely made it into the canon of scripture....some scholars speculate that it was the very last new Testament book canonized (that is, authorized by the church fathers).... And not until the fourth Century A.D. And we can also

see here the very diverse views of Jesus just among the four gospels.... Matthew Mark and Luke never equate Jesus with God....and not to mention the hundreds of other texts written in this same era about Jesus that didn't make it into the canon at all, all having different takes on the nature of the Christ....But the teachings of Jesus are so radical in this gospel that the writer tells us that many left the following, left the community...you remember when Jesus told his disciples that to have life they must partake of his body and blood...you remember what they said?...who can stand such a teaching!?...and left. Some just didn't and don't get the metaphor....that this Logos, this Word, this Word that is Way, is nurture for life.

So to cut to the chase in this gospel one thing is crystal clear....that to know Jesus is to know God...and to know Jesus therefore is to know the secret of what makes the universe tick....and to know Jesus is to know the Jesus principle, the God principle, that which Jesus stood and stands for, what the Jesus movement stood and stands for....and to know Jesus is also to know ourselves, to know ourselves as light bearers sent into the world as the Christ is sent to create the world in the image of heaven...the same mission for which Jesus was sent, the Logos of the world, we...we born in the beginning....the Logos, the Word which permeates the created order for the good....The remainder of this gospel fleshes out in poetic and metaphorical, and sometimes cryptic language what this principle looks like in the flesh. We are given clues, hints, shadows, images of the Logos among us: Images of mercy and compassion...images of generosity and community... images of the mutuality of friendship...the kind of friendship that lays down its life, its whole being for the sake of the other....images of vulnerability...all images of the one light that created and creates this world to this day...God images, Jesus images, human images, the Logos in and through creation as life and light....and one more audacious claim: that the dark has not overcome it....never has and never will....there is darkness to be sure...but the light will be the true life of the world and it is for us light bearers...logos bearers to stay about the mission of making the world go round as it should....by living the Jesus way....by literally living God's life....who can stand such a teaching!?

Lately I have been thinking of this gospel in this way...if I got this from somewhere I don't remember where....I call it the two sided lens.... that this gospel is describing Jesus as the lens through whom we see and know God....and Jesus is also the lens through whom God sees and knows us....This is the oneness for which Jesus prays in his farewell discourse in

John from which we just read....that to live lives of loving sacrifice, in short to live lives loving our neighbor as we love ourselves, we live in the beginning....you remember....in the beginning was the Word....we live in the beginning of a new world being made as we speak.... A big bang of creative love expanding still, a sacrificial outpouring of love, a primordial energy that engenders up and against the darkness, justice and non-violence and well being and dignity for all....the secret of the beginning at last... brothers and sisters may we live with one accord in this way....Our lives that we live and the light we bear is the same life and light of the divine.... may we live in the gracious harmony of truth....May God grant us the courage to live such lives, for to live into our godlikeness is to live for the beginning that breaks upon us, to live like the Christ, the God-word as nurture for the world, and to see God's glory in this work...To shine godlike in the darkness is our vocation which requires a profound leap of faith.... Word, God, Christ, humankind, same life, same substance. The big bang still in its beginning into which we leap.....which requires an audacious faith.... an audacious faith!