

Lent V Year B

“Those who love their life lose it; and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

This is going to be something of a review, if you will... We've talked about this before.... Just a couple of months ago as a matter of fact... but we are about to return to John's Gospel in the lectionary for the next several weeks, on in to Easter, so I thought reminding us of John's thematic bias might be helpful to us... It is for me. For those of you who remember Aristotle's poetics, you know that in ancient rhetoric, and the gospel of John from which we just read falls into that genre... Aristotle holds that the prologue of a piece of rhetoric tells us what the rhetorical agenda will be principally about ...a cheat sheet as it were... In the gospel of Mark from which we will read most of this year, year B... the prologue is about Jesus' Baptism... so the gospel of Mark is a treatise on... baptism, the baptismal life of the community, Jesus the archetype of the baptized... Now the lectionary elves have moved us out of reading from Mark's gospel, and from now through Easter we will be reading chiefly from the gospel of John... the most enigmatic of the four gospels... so much so that it was of great controversy with the early church fathers whether to include it in the canon of scripture at all.... so let's look briefly at the prologue and perhaps we'll get a good idea as to the principal theme of John and we'll thereby be prepared for the coming readings over the next weeks.... And whenever you decide to read John on your own, you'll already know what it is all about. So an excerpt of the prologue:

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.

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,

So we now know that this gospel is one of Christology, a philosophical treatise about the true nature of Christ...I am Vine....I am bread....I am wine...I am shepherd....I am gate; I am light... we hear these metaphors throughout this gospel;....but the key word here in the prologue is Logos, Word....a word very important in Greek philosophy....Greek philosophy being the intellectual air that the new Testament scribes breathed in the late first century of the common era when this gospel was written.... Logos means divine knowledge....quite literally a communicative link between heaven and earth, a concept first articulated in the West, as far as we know, by Plato...but here the gospel writer makes the audacious claim that Jesus the Christ is that word, that was and is of God, the same as God, since the beginning....the divine Logos, the Word made human and a part of history....that the truth of the universe, its origins, its modus operandi, is seen and known in God's human son....Jesus, the Word, the author of life and light still creating the cosmos as it was in the beginning...and John makes the other startling claim, that this divine light is the light of humankind (a claim that institutional Christianity has largely ignored)....So for John's theology there is no separating the divinity of the Christ from the divinity of those who follow him....humanity and divinity same substance as it were....not super nature, but true nature...we too therefore implied in Incarnation....As Jesus is being identified, we are being shown our true identity as well...we of course disciples also, who Jesus says will do greater things than he. Jesus, here, the model of the true human, the way we are all made; we often claim that Jesus is the lens through whom we see God, but surely the converse is true: Jesus is the lens through whom God sees us... I don't think many modern Christians believe that....that we are made in God's image... bear God's DNA, as it were...In protestant and Roman Christianity we are too busy putting ourselves down, or being put down by the church as unworthy....which happens to be a convenient way to abdicate our incarnational responsibility... Our Word-ness.

Two weeks ago we read the account of the so-called Temple tantrum, where Jesus turns over the tables of the money changers...and drives them and the merchants selling animals out of the Temple courtyard....but the practice of buying animals for Temple sacrifice was common practice since time immemorial....so something else is happening here...the writer of this gospel is making a social and political statement...that the temple authorities are in league with Rome the oppressor...they operate the temple under the auspices of empire....the Temple authorities have acquiesced to unfettered self interest....and are in complicity with Roman interests, keeping a

watchful eye on would be revolutionaries. This is the context into which the Word is made flesh.

In today's reading from John's gospel Jesus is alluding to his impending death at the hands of the state, he considered one such revolutionary....but more importantly, as he does throughout this gospel, he speaks of a way of life....a way of life which is God's life in the flesh in the world....the word made human...John is speaking of our living into the truth of who we are....and the operative word shot through this gospel is *befriending*.... philios....which we politely translate as brotherly love... (like Philadelphia... the so-called city of brotherly love) but the word is much more rich... (Philadelphia... the city of befriending) It means loving one's neighbor at least as much as we love ourselves, that we are responsible for the very well being of God's people, which are all people....and not just well being, but dignity and respect as well...In our gospel text salvation means well being and dignity....so salvation is not something we keep for ourselves, but that which we as the body of Christ are to give away.... our vocation in earth is to befriend our neighbor....Befriending meaning... feeding....healing...clothing.... peacemaking...calling out the unjust structures that exist for self interest only, structures that oppress and disenfranchise.... to bring dignity to the abased....we are called to hate, as our text puts it, we are called to hate, let go of our infectious self interest and live for the greater good...that means we've got plenty to do in Alabama.... and would that foreign policy were based on such an ethic.... To die to self interest to be sure is swimming up stream in our modern culture...and in Jesus' case it cost him his life....but that life is raised in us, it is in our very DNA...and it is for us to bear it to a broken world....wherever there is injustice or indignity or oppression even in our institutions including government and corporations... and the church for that matter....then it's our business as the baptized to set things right... to be the Word....the creation is still in its artful becoming....and brothers and sisters we have a hand and a say in that process, our hearts, vessels of the Word, are made for it...as the baptized we are world changers,....dead to self interest and alive to loving sacrifice for the good of the whole..... We are called to a life of love... and the instrument of love, at least according to this gospel is justice..... we are to plant the seeds of justice so that love may flourish.... The metaphor of the seed implies that the work we do for the good bears exponential consequences....so, we come as Jesus comes, we come as Word to bear the glory of God's self giving life to the world....Listen to what the thunder said... that God's name and the way of God will be glorified again and again....and that task is for us, bearers of the Word, the Word made

human, bearers of the one light that the darkness will not overcome.... This is the very vocation for which we were born...By the Grace of God, may we have the courage to embrace it.