

Sermon for 1-3-10
John 1:1-5, 10-18

At the start of a new year we look back at the past year and see what we have done. If we have acted in ways that don't fit what we say we believe, we have the opportunity to set a new course. We may say that it is important to be generous, then we look back. How much have we given to others? We may say that exercise is important, then we look back. How often have we been active? If the answer is positive then we continue on in the New Year. If the answer is negative we need to look forward hoping that we can grow and change in the New Year.

The mission statement for our church says, "Bell Memorial Presbyterian Church is a Christian mission center in which all members are missionaries, grow as disciples of Jesus Christ, and share in God's mission in the world. How have we done? As we go into the new year I hope we will gain a better understanding of the mission God has for us as a church.

We are called to be missionaries. Christian missionaries share the good news about Jesus Christ in a way that those around them can begin to grasp. We need to be able to answer our hearer's question, 'But who is Jesus?' This is simple and yet it is not. How do we communicate about Jesus in a way that gets across his claim on our lives? Consider your response if you were talking to a child or to someone who had never understood Jesus before? Presbyterian missionary Lesslie Newbigin puts it this way, "How do you begin to explain that which must in the end be accepted as the beginning of all explanation?"¹ How we communicate Jesus is like describing a color to someone who has never seen it. There is no true reference point other than the color. Still we have to try.

John begins in this way, "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."

To introduce his readers to Jesus, John takes them back to Genesis. "In the beginning God created...then he said, 'let there be light.'" John talks about the Word rather than Jesus, to move us towards understanding who Jesus is. The Word pre-existed creation; the Word is distinct from God; yet the Word is God. This Word shaped the world. The first act of creation was God speaking: let there be light. The Word brings life/light for people. Jesus who is God brings light/life to all creation.

To accept that Jesus is the source of life, to understand how he brings light we need the whole story of Jesus. So we will be looking a John all year. Even before we fully understand, we need this beginning, to be made ready to understand this Jesus

we have encountered. (We have to begin somewhere or we are overwhelmed. Like doing a puzzle. We are given a picture on the box, but we have to trust or discover that the pieces, many of which don't connect to one another, will fit together to make the picture. We have to start putting together one piece at a time. We may get frustrated along the way but there is a complete picture to be arrived at. Like cooking something new. We have a recipe, but before we start there is nothing but ingredients in different places. It may even taste bad along the way. It is only when we taste the final product that we understand what the recipe was about.

Our lives are to be a beginning for other people to understand Jesus. Our lives communicate the transformative power of Jesus for all lives. We can not make them understand, but that doesn't mean that we don't tell of who Jesus is to us even as we seek to understand and live life in him.

Light begins new life in Genesis. This life we live comes into being through Jesus whether we acknowledge him or not. For us light uncovers sin, what is wrong and hidden. Light lets us see things as they really are. Light lets us look outside self to understand the world around us and our relationships. The light lets us look inside our self to understand the contradictions of our nature. We see our capacity for good and our inclination to do evil. We see a greater purpose for our life and our tendency for self-absorption. We see the tensions of hope and despair, piety and godlessness that we struggle with. This light that Jesus brings into being is real in the darkness (which is what we confront when we try to find life, meaning apart from Jesus the only source of life.)

Warning: If we accept that Jesus was in the world and is the originator of all life, this will redefine our life and how we see the world. As Christian missionaries we say there is no way of understanding God apart from Jesus. As Christian missionaries we say that there is no meaning to life apart from Jesus. Most people reject this, because believing that Jesus created light and that Jesus is the light means there is no other option for real life than living in his way. There is rejection because people do not really understand this and how can they believe what they don't understand.

God seeks to break through these rejections. Who God is cannot be perceived directly by ordinary senses. Who God is can be recognized in Jesus Christ the Word become flesh. Jesus comes to reveal God. Jesus' living is the perfect way of conveying life in a way we can begin to understand. We can't become God in order to make sense of things. But God can become one of us so we can begin to understand his grace and truth.

Grace is seen in the acts of Jesus told of in John. Truth is seen in the teachings of Jesus in John. The life and words of Jesus are a demonstration of God's character and an explanation of God's relationship with humans and of his purpose for us.

Jesus' whole ministry gives glimpses of the humble obedience and limitless giving of love to God we were made for.

To know the life of Jesus Christ and to listen to him is to begin to understand who he is. We expose our lack of understanding when our lives don't demonstrate his grace and truth to others, as we interact with them.

God doesn't give up on us. "From his fullness we all have received grace upon grace." When we see the light and believe, this becomes part our understanding of life. As we receive him and believe in his name we experience his life in us in such a way that we cannot restrain the experience of God's grace and truth to our own lives. There is so much grace and truth that the whole community of believers is caught up in a chain reaction of grace. We offer God's free gift of love in Jesus Christ to others in word and deed.

Our mission as a church is to share who Jesus is with those he calls us to be in relationship with. Will it be kids in our community, teen mothers, those in Sudan, others? We need to discern to whom God wants us to communicate our understanding that Jesus is pre-existent, involved in the act of creation, and superior to created beings; that Jesus is above all creations of our own mind which would control our living, that Jesus bring life. We need to discern to whom God wants us to communicate our understanding of Jesus coming to earth as the Word became flesh to bring God into everyday life in a way that transforms our living. To whom is God calling us to share the ultimate secret of life? God made known in Jesus Christ brings new life.

ⁱ Newbigin, Lesslie. The Light Has Come. p, 2.