**January 5, 2020 John 1:1-18**

***A Christmas Story***

**Scripture:**

John 1:1-18 NRSV (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, and the life was the light of all people. (5)The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome 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. (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, 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, 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. (17)The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (18)No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

**Notes:**

1. John’s ***purpose*** is to prove that Jesus is the Son of God
   1. Jesus spoke words of awesome ***power***.
   2. ***Love*** propelled him, to rescue and save the lost
   3. Jesus is a ***message*** from God.
2. We must ***prepare***.
   1. ***Regard*** the Word of God.
   2. ***Recognize*** the Word of God.
   3. ***Receive*** the Word of God.
3. To all who receive Him, He gives the power/authority to become the ***children*** of ***God***.
   1. ***Submit*** to Jesus.
   2. Stay ***close*** to Jesus.
   3. ***Speak*** about Jesus.
   4. We are being called to ***prepare*** the ***way***.

**Transcript:**

It was the December of 1986 and I was a first year teacher at Allegany High School. I was unaware of the traditions of the Holiday Season in the school, unaware of the expectations, just unaware, of what I was to do. I was doing my best but the students shut down the week before Christmas break. From Monday on through the week, students refused to do any assignments of meaning; and I realized that there were no other classrooms in the building doing any meaningful learning either.

So, I asked a question, what do you want to do for the rest of the week. One young man suggested a big Christmas party, I said no, 45-minute periods are not long enough to have a party. Another suggested doing nothing; however, I knew if they did nothing turmoil would breakout. So my response was no again. Finally, somebody suggested watching a movie, Hmmm, that would work, if we had a two-hour movie and watched 30 minutes each day for the rest of the week, the movie would conclude on Friday. I asked what movie would you like to see? I warned them it had to be appropriate for school and their ages; it could not have foul language or adult situations, and somebody said, “How about ‘A Christmas Story’”, the story of Ralphie and his plight to get a Red Ryder BB Gun for Christmas. I said yes and the rest is history.

Most of us have seen the movie or at least parts of it. The movie brings us into situations similar to our own; maybe a little exaggerated to what we remember about Christmas’ past. We can share a laugh; we can remember memories of our own from childhood.

But many of us know that the commercialized story of Christmas represented in the movie “A Christmas Story” is far from what really took place on the night of our dear Saviors’ birth. We are all very familiar with the events found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. The Virgin who was with child, the proud man who submitted to the Lord’s request, and assumed responsibility for God’s only Child. The trip to Bethlehem from Nazareth, no room at the inn, and giving birth to the child in a stable, wrapping the newborn in strips of cloth and lying him in a manger.

But did you know there is another Christmas Story, yes there is found in the Gospel of John. Much more cryptic and very much more confusing, but a Christmas story just the same; Stand with me as we share in the reading of our passage in John 1:1-18

(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, and the life was the light of all people. (5)The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome 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.

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John gets right to the point. John’s purpose in this Gospel writing is simple, he intends to prove conclusively that Jesus is the Son of God. That Jesus the son was with God the Father from the very beginning. That the Holy Spirit was there as well, moving among the people of God all along. And that all who believe in him will have eternal life.

John is writing after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem which occurred in 70 AD, most likely between 85-90 AD, and before being sent to the island of Patmos. He is writing to new Christian believers as well as those who are searching; searching for something more than what this world has to offer, searching for meaning in their life.

Over 90% of the content found on the Gospel of John is unique to it. 6 of the 8 miracles recorded are unique to John, the Upper Room Discourse is unique to John; He doesn’t use a genealogy to impress people, However he does portray Jesus as one who was present at the beginning of time, the creator of all things, of being the son of God, And still being God himself.

John illustrates Jesus as somewhat a Super Hero. Jesus spoke, and galaxies whirled into place, stars burned the heavens, planets began orbiting their suns; words of awesome, unlimited, unleashed power. He spoke again, and the waters and lands were filled with plants and creatures, running, swimming, growing, and multiplying, words of animating, breathing, pulsing life. Again, he spoke, and man and woman were formed, thinking, speaking, and loving; words of personal and creative glory. Eternal, infinite, unlimited; He was, He is, and He always will be the Maker and Lord of all that exists. Whether they know it or not and then he came in the flesh to this speck in the universe called planet Earth.

The mighty Creator became a part of the creation, limited by time and space and susceptible to aging, sickness, and death. But love propelled him, and so he came to rescue and save those who were lost to give them the gift of eternity. He is the Word; he is Jesus, the Messiah.

It is this truth that the apostle John brings to us in this book. John's Gospel is not a life of Christ; it is a powerful argument for the incarnation, a conclusive demonstration that Jesus was, and is, the very heaven-sent Son of God and the only source of eternal life.

John discloses Jesus' identity with his very first words, "In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God" (1:1, 2); and the rest of the book continues the theme. And John is eyewitness to the greatest story ever told, ever shared, and ever heard.

John’s Gospel takes very seriously the communication of God in Jesus. Jesus *is* a message from God by telling us that Jesus *is* the Word. For John, the *Word* had both Old Testament context and cultural context. The *Word* is the powerful means of God’s activity in the scripture, such as in creation. For the Greek person, the *Word* was the rational principle behind the universe. John combines both these concepts of God’s activity and the rational principle behind the entire universe, to tell us the story of Jesus.

Yet we can be distrusting of words; worrying about the *fine print*, wondering if something sounds *too good to be true*. For example, how many of the Magi visited Jesus as he lay in the manger? What was the name of the Angel who announced Jesus birth to the Shepherds? The truth doesn’t make a difference in the story of Jesus yet so many people, strive to find out these details, even though they have no benefit. John’s Gospel shows how our relationship with words can show the stresses of our relationship with *the* Word and how we can correct them. We want to communicate with God, But because we can be distrusting of words, we must prepare.

We must **REGARD** the Word of God (vv. 3-5). John paints a picture of the world as light and dark. We are part of that darkness that attempts to overcome the Word. “Overcome” (v. 5) has the feel of *wrestling* of attempting to *best* the Word. When we wrestle against Jesus, we do so to our own harm. Wrestling against the Word, against the centrality of God’s communication in Jesus is like wrestling against gravity. You cannot win and even if you think you have won for a moment, then the more painful the loss! Properly regarding the Word of God means raising your value and the value of others. John says that we were created through the Word, through Jesus (v. 3). St Irenaeus, a leader in the early church, said something like this: Humans are made by the Word of the Lord. Angels did not make humans. Angels are not *strong* enough to make humans (*Against Heresies,* 4.20.1.). Think about it: Angels; Those powerful, majestic beings before whom people mistakenly fell down in worship and fear are not strong enough to make *you.* Yet there are those who are more focused on angels than in obedience to Jesus.

**We must RECOGNIZE the Word of God (v. 10).** John says that in spite of being made through Him, the world does not recognize the Word the world does not recognize Jesus. Paul’s example of a seared conscience (1 Tim 4:2) points out what this means. Because we are made through the Word, we need to have a connection to the Word. Our conscience is meant to guide us, but they have been damaged and so do not work. Because we have been part of the darkness, because we have not regarded the Word, we also cannot recognize the Word. But Refocusing on Jesus can help us to change that. Just like reading slowly can help us improve communication, so can refocusing on Jesus help us to recognize Him again.

**We must RECEIVE the Word of God (v. 11).** The Greek word for “receive” is *lambano.* It means to associate, like a friend; to have close as a companion. John says that we belong to the Word; we are His own, but we do not receive Him. If we do not receive the Word of the Lord, we do not receive Jesus, when we do not let the Word get close to us or when we hold Jesus at arm’s length. During these days of Christmas, we can take the time to receive Him properly. The carol, O Little Town of Bethlehem, puts it like this: *How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is giv’n*; *So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His Heav’n*. *No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin*, *Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in*.

I urge you to receive the Word properly with meekness, receiving Him as a gift from the Father. It’s in this reception that we can begin to understand not only who Jesus is, but who we are. John says that to all who receive Him, He gives the power/authority to become the children of God (v. 12). This is allowing Jesus to draw close to us recognizing the Word so that we may regard and properly receive the Word. That is what truly elevates who we are, that is what truly gives life.

Which do you find most challenging, Regarding, Recognizing, or Receiving the Word? Do you regard Jesus for who he really is? Where is Jesus on your list of priorities? Is he at the top, the middle or at the bottom? Or is his will in your life not on the list at all? We make time for the things that are regarded as important to us; Our children, our parents, our families, our friends, ourselves, But are we taking the time and regarding him as the creator of the universe; Are we regarding him as the lamb of God who came to take away our sins? Are we regarding him as the most important thing in our life?

Do you recognize Jesus for who He is? Do you really see him as Lord of your life Or is Jesus just something that you check off your list? Is Jesus your friend; or is He a character in a story you read that gives you hope.

Do you receive Jesus as your friend today? Only you can create the list of priorities in your life. Only you can accept his invitation to a friendship that will last for eternity. Only you can place Him on your list and where he ranks in the priorities of things. But a relationship with Jesus is the only way you can get an eternity with him. He tells us in John 14, *"(6)I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (7)If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." (John 14:6-7 NRSV)*

How can the discipline of waiting on the Lord, help you grasp who Jesus is and the life He offers? As you wait consider the places you have been and things you have seen. Consider where you are in relationship with Jesus. Are you standing in the light; Are you standing in the dark; Or are you somewhere in between standing in the shadows. Which do you most need to do right now—Submit, Stay Close, or Speak about Jesus?

**Submit to Jesus**. If Jesus really is who the Gospel of John says He is the Word of God, the active presence of God, the foundation of the entire universe; Then submitting to Jesus is the only reasonable decision. To submit to Jesus means to live under the authority of Jesus.

**Stay close to Jesus**. Actually, staying close to Jesus is how you submit to Jesus. Staying close to Jesus is the only way you can recognize Him. The person who wrote the Gospel of John was someone who knew Jesus personally, he wrote this gospel, this story about Jesus, so that you could know Him personally, too.

**Speak about Jesus**. In this introduction to John’s Gospel, we hear about another John who was sent from God. It says that he was a witness to the light a witness to Jesus. John the Baptist realized that his highest calling was pointing to Jesus. John the Baptist lived to be a little older than 30 years old. He died because he confronted a morally warped, corrupt politician and his unlawful wife. He confronted the sin of the leaders of their day. For most of us, this is not how we would like our life to end. John’s life is not the prototype, the model we would like to follow. But because John the Baptist is one who knew what it meant to submit to Jesus, to stay close to Jesus, and to speak about Jesus he is mentioned right alongside Jesus in this introduction.

Roughly 60 years after his death, John the Baptist still comes up when Jesus is being introduced to people. But it’s not just 60 years after his death. It’s now 2000 years and we’re still talking about John the Baptist…why? Because he pointed to Jesus. Because he is the one who prepared the way for the Lord, For Jesus to enter into his ministry. This is something we can do as well, Just as John called out to the people Just as John told them about the one to come. We too can call out to our friends And tell them about the one to come, about Jesus coming again. Jesus Christ is coming again and we are being called to prepare the way. That is our Christmas Story, A Christmas Story for each of us.