

John 1:1-18 Pastor Bill Uetricht Christmas Day 12/25/16

Will Farrell's character in the movie *Talladega Nights* says that he likes the Christmas Eve Jesus the best. Addressing the baby Jesus in a phenomenally long and humorous dinner prayer, Will's character says: "Dear tiny Jesus, in golden fleece diapers . . . Dear eight pound, six ounce newborn infant Jesus, don't even know a word yet, just an infant, so cuddly, but still omnipotent."

Truthfully, many of us like the Christmas Eve Jesus—the little baby, the cute cuddly newborn who, according to Luke's story, is born in a barn and placed in a manger, a feeding trough. Although we may overlook the rugged details of this story, we still love the little baby. I mean, who doesn't love little babies?

You would think that the church would allow us to revel in the arrival of this new baby for a while, but heck, one day later and you and I are not talking about babies. We got our baby fix last night, and today we are on to talking about the meaning of the whole story—the whole Jesus story, the whole God story.

Oh, it's not that we are not in a season of joy. We are. Our first reading from Isaiah makes that very clear as it speaks of God winning the victory, as in a victory of a battle. A messenger has been sent from the battlefield announcing peace, good news, and salvation (victory). God wins; God reigns, this messenger proclaims. As he runs proclaiming the message the watchmen on the wall catch on to the message, and they start to sing for joy. God is coming home, the messenger is saying. And the implication is that if he is coming home, all the exiles whom the Babylonians have sent off far and wide will be coming home, too. Everybody should rejoice. God has come to the aid of his people. Even the ruins of Jerusalem should join in the singing.

The spirit of Christmas is without a doubt a spirit of joy. This baby born last night brings joy to his parents, to the shepherds, to the world. This baby is bringing peace, salvation, comfort. Good news, good news, the angels sang! Born to you today is a baby, the Savior of the world.

This is a time of great joy, but the joy today has already grown up; it is much bigger than a baby. This joy is bigger than time even, bigger than a specific people, a specific place, a specific era. This joy takes us back before creation. It points us to what life has meant from the beginning.

“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.”

John is taking us back to Genesis. “In the beginning” is how Genesis begins, how the whole Bible begins. Yet John is also taking us back to the wisdom tradition, discovered in such books as Proverbs. In Proverbs we are told that God had a partner when he created the world. The partner was wisdom. In today’s gospel, the partner is the “Word.” In some ways, the “Word” can be translated wisdom. In the beginning was the wisdom of life, the order of life, that which gathers life together and makes it meaningful and decipherable.

For John, that thing, that Word became flesh and dwelt among us. That which orders life, that which gives it meaning, tented among us, moved into our neighborhood. This eternal word that existed before time and space entered time and space and became a part of it, concrete and earthy. Now we know that John is talking about Jesus. For him, Jesus is the eternal Word, the order and meaning of existence, its logic.

We started last night with a little baby, with ordinary parents, ordinary fears. We confronted ordinary working people. And now we are lifted to the extraordinary. We are taken to that which is much bigger than we would have ever known, that which has to do with the very rhythm of life, with its origins, and, yes, even with its destiny. Last night’s baby is a key to understanding what your life is all about, where it has come from, where it is going. It is a key to understanding the meaning of history itself, where *it* has come from and where *it* is going.

The Book of Hebrews when reflecting upon the meaning of Jesus’ life tells us that it is a matter of there being a new sheriff in town. It

looks to the past—“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets.” But then it identifies what has happened in Jesus: “In these last days, God has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.” He sounds like John as he is pointing to the significance of Jesus. God has done something in the past, which was good. But now something new has occurred in Jesus, something that has to do with what life has meant from the very beginning and what life will mean at the very end of time.

Christmas is really big. And its bigness is after you and me, small parts of history, small specks on this earth. You see, we meet the bigness in the small. It’s not that the small doesn’t matter. It’s not that babies are insignificant, that little towns are inconsequential, that the labor of average working people is a matter of triviality. Not at all. In fact, as I proclaimed last night, Christmas tells us that God shows up on the fringe, that God has a penchant for the ordinary, that while the world focuses on the rich and the famous, God seems to visit the left out and the marginalized. Babies really matter. Blue collar workers are vital to life. Towns that some people label “holes in the wall” are extremely important.

You matter, your ordinary struggles and uber-ordinary experiences are extraordinarily significant. It is in them that you hear the call of the universe. It is in them that you encounter what truly matters. It is in them that you experience the truly big. It is in them that you hear the Word, are drawn into what has been true about life from the very beginning. And if John and Hebrews are right what has been true from the very beginning we meet in Jesus. And if we meet it in Jesus, what has been true from the very beginning, then, is love and compassion. That is what Jesus was up to. That is what God has been up to and what God will be up to even at the very end of time.

Christmas wants you to join the eternal purposes of God. Christmas wants to draw you into the story of compassion and love that

has been true from the very beginning. Christmas wants to sweep you into the never-ending flow of amazing grace.

We've left behind the baby, the cattle stall, the little town, the shepherds and we've entered the work of Christmas. Howard Thurman in his poem "The Work of Christmas" puts it well:

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.

It's time for the love that the Christmas story means and the love that the stories of God have always meant and will always mean to become a way of life for us. After all, Christmas is not one night. It is a way of life—a way rooted in God's never-ending love story.