

Who Needs Jesus, Anyway? (John says WE do.)

Reconnect – Christmas Eve, 2009

Text: John 1:1-14; Romans 7:21-25

Key Thought: We need Jesus to bring us a new kind of life from God.

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it. God sent a man, John the Baptist, to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God. So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. "

Pre-Intro: A Merry New York Christmas (Rob Thomas)

Intro: A perfect Xmas in New York?

- The perfect image of Christmas – a city that cares, the best of the season, inspiring people, making the world a better place
- But scratch the surface, and it doesn't last for very long
- Our world can only pretend to be perfect, even for a day – listen to the editorial today in the National Post:

"The Child Born In Bethlehem" – National Post Editorial, December 24, 2009

We are learning new words these days. High school students can tell you about "anthropogenic" climate change, and the dangers of "anthropocentric" thinking. Man is the problem you see -- too much *anthropos* around. The world would be better off with fewer of us, a sentiment thinly-veiled at the recent Copenhagen summit.

Perhaps we need Christmas more than usual this year, though we are always in need of the good news about the baby born in Bethlehem. Christians celebrate at Christmas the coming of God as man, the eternal Son of the Father coming as man in Jesus Christ. What is celebrated is the birth of a baby, an occasion commemorated in every culture in every time and place. Every baby is good news. Lest we forget that elementary truth, Christmas reminds us. In churches the world over the Baby Jesus will be placed this night in the manger. Around nativity scenes little children will gather, fascinated by the wonder of it all.

Adults, burdened and weary by the toil and affliction of this world, can forget that fascination. But the Christian claim has not lost its power to captivate, to perplex, to inspire. God has become man. There is something very anthropocentric about the divine plan. God is on the side of man.

“On the side of” – conflict talk

- For a holiday that promises “peace on earth”, there’s a whole lot of conflict at Christmas
- Like when the crying starts, within a half hour of the last gift being opened from under the tree (see if I’m right!)
- So if we’re going to talk about conflict, it’s time to get our game faces on (check out Hope and Conor playing Xbox with each other – intense!)

[Bozo sock em toy (pull it out, play with it)]

- Sometimes life feels like a struggle – if you could just get on top of things – one big punch – then things would start to go our way
- Other times, it feels like WE are the bozo toy, and we lurch from one punch right into the next – and life is beating on us
- Either way, we can’t get ahead playing that game – we’re not ABLE to, because the rules are against us – we’re not strong enough to change things on our own – we need HELP – we need “God on the side of humanity”
- **[pull the plug on the Bopper]** – a different way is needed – how do we find it? How do we find a way through the battles of our world – everything that lines up against our health and happiness?
- John’s biography of Jesus is going to tell us how, by going back to the beginning of the problem – the very beginning – the “in the beginning” – let’s take a closer look

Text/Commentary – John 1:1-14

In the beginning the Word already existed.

The Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

He existed in the beginning with God.

- Ancient Christian song – one of the earliest
- “In the beginning” – same as the very start of the whole Bible
- “Word” = Greek *logos*
 - “the Force” – closest thing I can think of to compare to it today – means different things to different groups of people – to a pantheist, it’s the divine energy throughout the universe – to a movie buff, it’s what lets you get past the stormtroopers at Mos Eisley – to a youth pastor, it could be a way to build a bridge with people who have seen the movie
 - Everyone had an idea as to what it was, even if some of them were fuzzy on it – something important, something deep, something spiritual
- Right from the beginning, John is speaking to two very different groups of people – the religious “in” crowd, who have grown up with the understanding that they belong to the Jewish God
- But then he throws them a curveball, because immediately after he mentions the *logos*, or “The Force” – which the religious people would have been leery of as a concept, because it was a well-known concept for everyone else – those who followed other religions, those whose only religion was reason or logic

- The Word – the “Force” – already exists in the beginning – offensive to the religious crowd – because God is one
- The Word – the “Force” – is with God – connected to Him, somehow – there’s a very personal connection, a relationship there between them
- The Word – the “Force” – IS God – not something outside Him – they are REALLY connected – the Force is actually God, part of God, somehow – and things have always been this way
- And it IS His “Word” - “Word” – God’s powerful self-expression – His promise – His standard, His integrity – so indicative of who He is as to be indistinguishable from Him

**God created everything through him,
and nothing was created except through him.**

**The Word gave life to everything that was created,
and his life brought light to everyone.**

**The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness can never extinguish it.**

- “The Word” – God’s message of Himself – God’s connection to the world – how He reveals Himself, the promises He makes, the way God relates to everything
- “extinguish” – literally, “apprehend” – the darkness can’t understand it or grasp it, and the darkness can’t grab it and defeat it, either

God sent a man, John the Baptist, to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

- “light to everyone” “brought light to everyone” – a light so bright that it shone on everyone – no matter who you were, whatever background – nowhere to hide from it – the world is changed by its coming because once the darkness is dispelled – once you turn the light on – then you can see what’s really there – you can see what the darkness is hiding, good or bad

He came into the very world he created, but the world didn’t recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

- “he came” – literally, “he came home” – but home didn’t want to open up and let him in
 - Ill. Home for the holidays – something so ingrained in us – it’s newsworthy when people can’t get home for the holidays, when a storm comes, when people are trapped in airports and train stations and bus depots
- Jesus comes home to darkness – to confusion, even to betrayal
 - Ill. – Cade and Conor screaming in the night, scaring the wits out of each other – the confusion of darkness, the fear it brings

- But he perseveres, he beats it – and if you continue to read John’s biography of Jesus, you find out how – he becomes human, he fights the same battles that we do – with evil, with darkness, with temptation – and he goes to the cross and takes our spot, and gives us a shot at true life – a better life, a life where we’re not destined to continually be on the receiving end of the punches, a life with a light in the darkness, a life where we don’t have to stumble through, without purpose or passion or plans

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father’s one and only Son.

- “human” – literally, “flesh” – the power of God, God himself, actually becomes HUMAN – frail, weak, prone to flaws and shortcomings – how can you mix the divine and the human? The ideal and the real? And yet, these contradictions come together in Jesus (tastes great, less filling)
- Jesus goes on to say in these pages that if you’ve seen Him, you’ve seen God the Father – that He and the Father are one – they’re not just on the same page, they’re not just best friends or in a special kind of relationship – they’re actually, SOMEHOW, one and the same – humanity/divinity mixed, a mystery
- He’s unique – greater than any other – more than an avatar, or a teacher, or a guide, or a spiritual master – He brings people to God and God to people – the connection – He has reconnected a world that lost its way with the love and strength of God
- “glory” – greatness, essence, who he really is, seen him as he really is and what he really did – not just theories, not just stories, but sense and experience – John says, “we saw it ALL”

Key Thought:

We need Jesus to bring us a new kind of life from God.

It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong...

Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin?

Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

(St. Paul, in Romans 7:21-25, NLT)

Conclusion: Coming to life

C.S. Lewis quote from Mere Christianity:

What man, in his natural condition, has not got, is Spiritual life – the higher and different sort of life that exists in God. We use the same word *life* for both: but if you thought that both must therefore be the same sort of thing, that would be like thinking that the ‘greatness’ of space and the ‘greatness’ of God were the same sort of greatness. In reality, the difference between Biological life and Spiritual life is so important that I am going to give them two distinct names. The Biological sort which comes to us through Nature, and which (like everything else in Nature) is always tending to run down and decay... is *Bios*. The Spiritual life which is in God from all eternity, and which made the whole natural universe, is *Zoe*. *Bios* has, to be sure, a certain shadowy or symbolic resemblance to *Zoe*: but only the sort of resemblance there is between a photo and a place, or a statue and a man. A man who changed from having *Bios* to having *Zoe* would have gone through as big a change as a statue which changed from being a carved stone to being a real man.

And that is precisely what Christianity is about. This world is a great sculptor’s shop. We are the statues and there is a rumour going round the shop that some of us are some day going to come to life.

- Lives are still changed – it doesn't matter if you have never thought of yourself as a Christian – perhaps you've always had a different religious or non-religious label
- It doesn't matter if you don't have a family background or if you do, it doesn't matter what your ethnicity is, it doesn't matter where you come from – the light from Jesus shines all through our world, in every corner of every heart
- Ill. – iconographer who used to be the illustrator for the Soviet propaganda machine (from the Post)
- **[how to make that change?]**

Response: Silent Night (singing)