AND WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY

John 1:1-18

January 3, 2021

Guilford Park Presbyterian Church

Once upon a time, just before Christmas, a man went to his dentist because he felt something wrong in his mouth. His dentist examined the man and said: “That new upper plate I put in for you six months ago is deteriorating. What have you been eating?”

The man thought for a moment and replied: “All I can think of is that about four months ago my wife made some asparagus and put some stuff on it that was delicious – Hollandaise sauce, I think. I loved it so much I now put it on everything – meat, toast, fish, vegetables, everything.”

“Well,” said the dentist, “that’s probably the problem with that plate in your mouth. Hollandaise sauce is made with lots of lemon juice, which is highly corrosive. It has eaten away your upper plate. I’ll make you a new plate, but this time I’ll make it out of chrome.”

“Why chrome?” asked the man.

To which the dentist replied: “It’s simple. Everyone knows there’s no plate like chrome for the Hollandaise!”

Well, there is no place like home, to be sure – for the holidays or for any other time, for that matter. And there is especially no place like home when we are aware that the real presence of God is there with us. And that includes this place – this church – Guilford Park Presbyterian Church. And even though we are not bodily together in this physical space these days, we are together in the Spirit. We are together because the kingdom of God is our home – and the kingdom of God is everywhere. For us who have awakened to the real presence of God with and within us all, there is no place – that is not home!

Today we are together for a while through this medium of YouTube – in order to worship God – on this 2nd Sunday after Christmas – on this day which is three days before the so-called Epiphany of our Lord. Epiphany is always on January 6th. Epiphany is the day that commemorates the manifestation of the glory of God in Jesus the Christ to the world at large. Our tradition interprets this manifestation of Jesus in three stories from our scripture: (1) that famous story of the Magi bringing gifts to the baby Jesus; (2) the baptism of Jesus and the revelation that this person is the Son of God, with whom God is well-pleased; and (3) the story in the gospel of John of Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana, revealing his glory and leading the disciples to believe in him.

So, today, we are in this home, in which God through the power and presence of the Spirit, is leading us to bear witness to the truth we believe – that we have seen the glory of God in the person of Jesus the Christ, who is the Word who became flesh and lived among us.

We in the church have always talked at great lengths about the “Word” of God. Theologians over the past 2000 years have spilled pages and pages of theological ink regarding the Word, and proper understanding and interpretation of the Word, and faithful obedience to the Word. The Word is central to all authentic Presbyterian worship.

For many church folks, “the Word” simply means “the Bible.” But the Word is much more than that. In Presbyterian theology, the Word is at least three things:

1. The Word is what the minister proclaims: the sermon, hopefully based upon careful and intelligent study of scripture, and faithful application of the message in scripture to our contemporary life. The Word is also the music we sing, the prayers we offer, and everything else we do in worship. Our worship service is a Service of the Word.
2. The Word is also the Bible – these words that the Spirit of God inspired human beings through the ages to write down. They wrote these words to witness to their own faith, to proclaim the faith to others, to witness to God and God’s dealings with God’s people. The Word is the message we receive when we read and study and pray these human words in the Bible. The Spirit of God joins these words to our minds and hearts – and we begin to understand the messages to which they point. But these words in the Bible are not the extent of the Word. The Spirit continues in our lifetime to inspire us to learn more and more about what God’s Word in the Bible really means, and to continue to grow in understanding.
3. The Word is the person Jesus the Christ. The Word that is the Bible points us in the direction of Christ. The Word in what the minister proclaims and in which we participate in worship helps us to see Christ. But Jesus the Christ – is the Word! And that is the Word that lives with and within us all as the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Christ is the Word that is above all other manifestations of the Word.

In our gospel lectionary text for today, John has a lot to say about the Word. The first words of his gospel focus upon the Word. “In the beginning was the Word” writes John. That is, before churches, before Bibles, before the 1st century Galilean man named Jesus, before the revelation of that man as the Son of God – there was the Word. When God created everything there is, in the beginning, God created through Word. God “said” “Let there be light.” God “said” “Let us make humankind in our image.” John understands this creative activity of God – and he also understands the eternal nature of Jesus the Christ – as John proclaims the glory of God in Jesus the Christ throughout his gospel. For example, for John, Jesus came “from above,” as it were. And we are to be born again “from above” – awakening to the real presence and power of God – and embracing eternal life, here and now. It all begins with the Word – according to John.

“And the Word was with God,” John continues in his opening prologue. In the original Greek language of the gospel, this word, “Word,” is “logos.” “Logos” is a word pregnant with meaning. It is another word for “wisdom,” for example – intimately related to what the Old Testament refers to as the “wisdom” of God. For example, in the book of Proverbs we read a poetic personification of God’s wisdom as a symbolic character called “Lady Wisdom,” or, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, “Sophia.” In Proverbs this “Lady Wisdom” participates in the process of creation. She is responsible for bringing God’s presence directly to the people. She is a partner of God. John understands all this, and he understands the personal nature of Jesus’ relationship with God – that Jesus represents the wisdom of God. So, John writes: “The Word was with God.”

John then continues: “And the Word was God.” John understands the divine nature of Jesus – that this human being, Jesus, also embodies the real presence of God on earth. So, John sees Jesus the Christ as creator of new life, forgiver of who we are and what we do, sustainer of our day-by-day existence.

And this divine Word came to earth, became a human being, so that we other human beings might know – and embrace – the nature of God. So, John writes: “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.”

These words in John are for us – for we, too, have seen his glory – the glory of Jesus the Word. We have seen it in the Bible – in the messages that jump out at us from these words in the Bible, in the epiphanies we have – when we see the light – the light that is the Word of God that is so often way beyond the literal words we read.

And we have seen his glory in our worship experiences – even in these virtual ones – in everything we do and say and pray – especially when we seek first the kingdom of God – when we put aside the baggage we carry around in the kingdom of this world – that blinds us to the kingdom of God – baggage like self-centeredness.

And we have seen his glory in our personal encounters and relationships with other people – especially other folks of faith, folks filled with grace, folks who walk in light rather than darkness, folks who look first to the interests of others.

And, finally, we have seen his glory in the mirror. The Word became flesh and lived among us in order to show us how to be human beings made in the image of God – in order to equip us and strengthen us and inspire us to be disciples who embody the Word in our own flesh for the sake of other people, for the sake of peace.

Today, when we eat and drink the bread and wine in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, the Word becomes flesh once again, in a very real way. This bread and wine are symbols of the Word. When we ingest this holy food, the food becomes part of who we are and what we do. And the Word lives again – in us.

So, may God bless you all in this coming year of 2021. And may the Word live in us all, and in this Guilford Park Presbyterian Church. There is no place like home!

Let us pray: God of Word: Give us wisdom to know your Word; peace to experience your Word; and strength to proclaim your Word. We pray in the presence and power of the Word himself – Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. AMEN.