

Coop's Scoops # 147: Sunday Sermon January 3, 2021



THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND DWELT AMONG US...ALLELUIA!

Sentence: Glory to Christ who is preached among the nations, and believed on in the world (see 1 Timothy 3: 16)

Readings: Isaiah 49: 8-13 Psalm 147: 13-21 Ephesians 1:3-6,15-18

The Collect:

God of power and life, the glory of all who believe in you, fill the world with your splendour and show the nations the light of your truth through Jesus Christ your Son our lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: 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,^[a] 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.^[a]

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,^[a] 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,^[a] 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,^[a] who is close to the Father's heart,^[b] who has made him known.

The Sermon:

We've likely said "Happy New Year" many, many times this week, and we've meant those words. We do most sincerely wish for happiness for our friends and our families, for our neighbours and communities throughout the world in this pandemic time. Today, I want to encourage us all to believe that there can be such a thing as a Happy New Year, and to give us all confidence and hope in the future. That's a tall order, isn't it? A tall order in a world such as ours, and a time such as this.

It was a tall order in Ezekial's day, too. Taken captive as a young man, educated and prosperous in his homeland, but now in bondage and slavery in Babylon, Ezekial looked around and saw nothing but trouble. His people were depressed and mournful; they were tired and hungry; they were defeated and hopeless, they were trying desperately just to get through one day at a time in a country where they were considered quite disposable. Of no value, except as free

labour. The temple was gone, the teachers were gone, the money was gone. They were desperate times. Ezekial and all his fellow citizens were at the mercy of the King of Assyria, a power much stronger than any they possessed themselves. "Happy New Year" would have sounded about as meaningless as it could ever sound in that time and in that place. But Ezekial was not silent. He was a prophet and he toiled for twenty eight years, calling the people to remember God, to practice holiness, and to count on something wonderful happening. Ezekial talked about a Redeemer. One who would gather all the people of Israel from every corner and bring them home. One who would wipe away tears and bring joy. One who would heal broken hearts and broken bodies and bring health. One who would bring peace. One who was stronger than than the King who held them captive.

Quite likely, for most of his prophetic years, Ezekial was speaking of a leader who would take the people home, to Jerusalem. But his vision went beyond that to speak about a Redeemer who would gather all nations, and bring all people home to the House of God. I'm sure there were many in Ezekial's day who called him an empty-headed dreamer, a foolish optimist, someone who just didn't get the reality of the situation. But Ezekial was right! The people of Israel were gathered, and were released from bondage, and did return to their homeland.

And on a starry night in Bethlehem, another Redeemer was born who would complete Ezekial's prophecy of freedom for all mankind. Jesus. The Messiah. The Saviour. Christ the Lord.

John writes so beautifully about that time. God became man and dwelt among us in our very human flesh. And the newborn Baby was not really new at all. He'd been there forever. If we place the word Jesus in every place John uses "the Word", we can see the true picture. In the beginning, Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God. All things were made by Him, and without Him, nothing was made. Jesus came into our world as Light and Life, and many people did not accept Him, because they preferred darkness. You see, Light makes everything clear and transparent. There was no place left to hide. No blemish left unnoticed. No sin left covered in darkness. Some people didn't like it at all. But for those whose hearts were open, for those who believed, everything changed. Life became brand new. They were re-born; not biologically based on heredity, not intellectually, based on new knowledge, not emotionally, based on inner disposition, but born by an act of the will of God. All who believed in Him were made to become His adopted children.

Ezekial was the prophet bringing hope of the Redeemer to his generation. John the Baptist was the prophet bringing the good news of the Redeemer to his generation. And we are called, like John, and like Ezekial to bring the truth about the Redeemer to our generation.

How do we do that? Just like John did. By pointing to the Light, by preparing people's hearts and minds to receive the Light. An English professor, **Dr. Alex Papaderos**, explained it to his students this way. "When I was a boy", he said, "I once found a motor cycle mirror smashed into hundreds of little pieces at an accident site. I couldn't find them all, and could never have put them back together if I did...so I just took the biggest piece." He reached into his pocket and

pulled out a tiny mirror, about the size of a quarter. “This is it. You see, I scratched it on stone for months, until I got it nicely round. I polished it a lot. And I used it every day of my childhood. I would twist it and turn it so that I could get the sunlight into places where the sun itself could never actually go. Into deep holes, and crevices in the cliffs, and long dark closets. It became a game...to see how far I could get the light to go by using the mirror. And when I became a man, I saw the game as a sort of parable of my life of faith. I know I am not the Light. But I know Light is present in our world – truth, and love, and knowledge of God, and power to break free of everything that enslaves us. My call from God is to be a reflection of that light, to take that light to places where it is desperately needed. The mirror, the tool I had for reflecting the Light of Christ, was the Word of God, the testimony of my own faith, and the authenticity of my love for others. And I have seen some dark places in our world changed by that Light, and some desperately dark hearts changed by that Light. That is the entire meaning of my life.”

Dr. Papaderos, like John, like Ezekial brought hope to his generation by pointing to Christ, the Redeemer. We have that same privilege. We have that same responsibility.

To people enslaved by fear, threatened by violence, overcome by addictions, desolate with grief, stooped with guilt, burdened by poverty, bound up by anything at all...to these people we can say “There IS a Redeemer. There is One who is stronger than anything that holds you captive. He is Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah. He can set you free with His love, with His power, with His

grace...because, you see, He loves you.” And that is the Good News for our generation!

I close with the words of a song written by Keith Green.

“There **IS** a Redeemer
Jesus, God’s own Son,
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
Holy, Holy One.
Thank you, O my Father,
For giving us your Son,
And leaving me Your Spirit
Til Your work on earth is done.”

Amen.

Prayer for Today:

O IMMORTAL Lord God, who inhabitest eternity, and hast brought thy servants to the beginning of another year: Pardon, we humbly beseech thee, our transgressions in the past, bless to us this New Year of 2021 ,and graciously abide with us all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP 1979)

Blessing : May the God of infinite goodness scatter the darkness of sin and brighten your hearts with holiness; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

