

John 1 v1-18

There was a lady who lived in the republic of Benin near the coast of Western Africa. Genevieve (Jenaveve) had to be the eyes for her three children. They were all born with congenital cataracts. Whenever she took them into the town she had to strap them to herself – her baby on her back and her other two children clinging to her arms – she became their eyes helping them navigate the dangers of a busy town, also, blindness had a stigma, thought to be caused by witchcraft, Genevieve cried out to God for help. Soon after, a man of her town, who knew her plight, told her that Mercy Ships were going to be visiting their port. This gave her hope and before she knew it, her three children were recovering from surgery able to see.

John's gospel story is all about giving his people hope. It's about God coming alongside them and shining light into their lives. People whose lives were shrouded in darkness, whether physical or spiritual or both and Jesus brings light, grace, healing and love.

Last Sunday we considered the resurrection story as we thought about Thomas, and his doubts and his faith.

Today the spotlight falls on Peter and John running to the tomb, because they had heard from Mary Magdalene that the stone had been rolled away, and Mary tells the disciples, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb and we don't know where they have put him!"

When they arrive at the tomb, John is first there, but he doesn't go in immediately, it is left to Peter. Peter was always diving in feet first, but we are told that John put his head round the corner of the tomb and saw the linen cloths that had bound Jesus' body, neatly folded, and then he went inside the tomb, and "he saw and believed".

His eyes were opened immediately. He was the first to see and believe.

What did John see and believe?

That's the question that I ask us all this morning.

Fast forward the events of the resurrection morning, and the best part of 70 years, and we meet with an elderly John, he is now as an old man. Scholars reckon that he lived till he was over 100 years old. At 100 he composes his gospel. All those years of faithful Christian living of following his Lord Jesus.

Almost 70 years since he first saw and believed; perhaps to John it seemed like yesterday. But of course, he has had 70 years to reflect, to plan, to compose, to share the good news.

The gospel of John are the words of a mature Christian man, who is telling the story of his best friend. He is writing to bring hope to his fellow Christians and to help others see and believe the good news. That is why he writes at the end of his story, **“Many other things were done...but these are written to help you believe”**.

John is the disciple whom Jesus loved. This is how John saw his relationship to Jesus. **He is the disciple that leaned on Jesus' breast during the last supper; he was the disciple who Jesus committed his mother Mary to when he died on the cross; he was the disciple, who was first to see and believe the resurrection; he was one of the disciples who saw Jesus at the last resurrection appearance at the lakeside.**

Yes, John was a disciple who could see what others couldn't, and a disciple who had a passion in bringing other people into this faith.

What did John see in Jesus, “He saw God's love being poured out for this world, he saw a love that came through Jesus and died on a cross that whoever believes in Jesus will never perish but have eternal life.”

Scholars tell us that as an old man, John dictated his gospel story of Jesus, and it was another younger man, also called John, but given the title “John the elder” who wrote down the Apostle's words. So, the gospel of John, is John's story about Jesus.

We are reading a story 2000 years old but written by an eye witness of Jesus; written by his beloved disciple. That thrills my heart! We can see and believe, what John saw and believed, he said 'we've seen his glory, the glory which he received as the Father's only Son'.

So let us listen and watch for a moment to John 1 v1-18, told in a modern presentation.

This presentation is by, Rev Steve Thomason. Associate professor of spiritual formation at Luther Seminary

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I communicated with him this week, asking if it was ok to use his work and he said,

“Yes, you may share my work. it is an honour that you would like to use my work to proclaim God’s word in your congregation. Thanks for sharing the link to your Church website.”

Prof William Barclay, one of our great thinkers within the Church of Scotland, wrote this about our reading today, “This is one of the greatest adventures of religious thoughts ever achieved.” Barclay sees John's overture to his gospel, as a great adventure; the apostle John has composed an insight into the being of God, that no other person has composed. He is taking his readers on a journey of faith and a journey that exposes them to the mind of God that created our world and worlds beyond our understanding.

Barclay translates John's words, “When the world had its beginning, the word was already there; and the word was with God and the word was God.” The rest of John's gospel is an exploration of what and who this word is.

People spend much time searching for meaning and purpose to life and this universe, they needn't bother, John has done it for us in his gospel.

“The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us” or as Eugene Peterson in his translation *The Message* pens it, **“The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood”**.

This is what John saw in Jesus. After 70 years of prayerful reflection, he realises that Jesus was God's eternal word entering this world and taking human flesh. God became a man and he did so for a purpose.

What was that purpose?

John, sees God coming to recreate men and women; a word that enters into the darkness of the world; a word that would change hearts and minds and bring reconciliation and peace; a word that was sent because God so loved the world.

John sees in Jesus that everything was created through him. Not one thing in all Creation was made without him.

I'm sure you are aware of the escalation of war in the Middle East with Iran retaliating against Israel with drone and missile strikes. Apparently 300 or so, were intercepted and destroyed in mid-air.

Has John's gospel anything to say to these frightening world situations.

Yes, it has, John points us to a God whose world we are a part of.

He writes, **“Not one thing in all Creation was made without him”**. What a thought!

What John does, is reveal to them who and what the Word is. He tells them we can get to know this Word and have a relationship with the Word.

To put it simply, It goes back to something my 5-year-old grandson Jack said to his gran, “was God lonely when he created us?”

John tells us that, God was there before he created anything, and the Word was with God, for the Word is the divine energy that brings all things into being. This is God's world and we are simply a part of it, we are called to care and look after this planet.

Creation is so precious, made by the word of God; his creative mind was behind the universe. This is what our faith tells us. He even goes further, in that the Word (Jesus) is the source of life; everything that has been created finds its source back to God. It comes from God and to God it will return.

Stephen hawking wrote, in his book *A Brief History of Time*, **“The eventual goal of science is to provide a single theory that describes the whole universe.”** In response to this, New Testament scholar Bruce Milne wrote, **“From the theological perspective, the theory is a person, Jesus Christ.”** Because through him all things were made.

“This light, said John, brought life to humanity.”

So, every breath we take, every step we make, finds its source in God.

That is why war, enmity has no space in this world.

John gives us answers to the big picture of life. He sees a bigger perspective and that is surely good for us this morning, to trust that our lives have their source in God; our lives were planned and created by him. He is our light and our strength.

Despite what happens in the Middle East, despite what happens in our lives, we can trust in a God who is our creator and sustainer.

But John is a realist, he sees the world as a dark place. He sees our human sin, our separation from God because of the evil in this world. He has lived a hundred years and I would imagine like the philosopher in Ecclesiastes, he

could say much about the evil in the world...and if we are honest also, the world is as bad as it's ever been.

But John sees in Jesus a light that shines into the darkness **3-8** God is at work through Jesus. Darkness is in the world and opposes Jesus' every step. But the light of Jesus will shine into the darkness of the world and expose it. Light dispels the darkness.

In John's gospel, Jesus employs the Old Testament name for God *I am*...and so he is reinforcing to his people, that in Jesus God is at work.

This is our hope this morning.

The apostle John introduces John the Baptist. John the Baptist, who himself attracted large crowds who came to hear him preach and baptise at the river Jordan; he prepares the way for Jesus as he tells the crowds that a light was coming into the world. He testifies that Jesus is the real light; John was only preparing the way. He said, **He is greater than I am for he existed before I was born.** John was pointing to the pre-existence of Christ before the creation of the world.

But the apostle highlights in his overture that not everyone was comfortable with the light of God. He came to his own but his own rejected him. His own were the Jewish people and the majority could not accept the light of God through Jesus because it exposed their evil deeds.

The world rejected the light. The very world that God had created rejected the light. John, early on, was pointing to the cross, and to Jesus' rejection by the Jews and the Romans. The light would be snuffed out, but only temporarily.

But he does say that there were some who accepted the light and they earned the title children of God. John was obviously speaking about the early disciples and the early church.

We have a flip calendar with daily readings on it and we've had it for years, it just seems to speak into whatever situation we are facing in life and it said, on Tuesday, when I was preparing this sermon, the reading was **“Jesus Christ is not valued at all until he is valued above all”.**

How valuable is Jesus to you?

What does it mean to see the World created through God's word – Jesus?

What does it mean to see the world as a dark place?

What does it mean to see Jesus as the Word made flesh dwelling amongst us?

What does it mean to see him as the light of the world?

John saw and believed and he invites us also to journey with him and see and believe and trust in Jesus.

Amen