

January 21-27, 2018

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Sunday, January 21, 2018

Text: Genesis 1:1-5

¹In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Every good story needs a good beginning. For God's story the beginning came with a formless void and the breath of God sweeping over the waters to ignite the creative process; a process that continues to this day and the next. God's creation is endless and far grander than any human words could describe. For us in the Northern Great Lakes Synod we need only to look out our windows to witness the awe-inspiring creativity of God.

Granted, it is freezing cold and our world is covered in white, but we can still see the beauty of the lakes and the tall pine trees that are a part of the wonder of God's creation. Let us take time in the beginning of our new story, our New Year, to appreciate all that God has created and continues to create.

Let us pray: *May God reveal the wonders of His creation and inspire us to appreciate all that lies before us.*



Monday January 22, 2018

Text: Deuteronomy 18:17-19

¹⁷Then the LORD replied to me: "They are right in what they have said. ¹⁸I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. ¹⁹Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable.

Deuteronomy reminds us that God raises up people to speak His words to humanity. As a pastor part of my role particularly in preaching is to create and deliver sermons that can bring forth God's living breathing word to the world and I can tell you that the task can be a little nerve racking. I was told that being nervous about giving a sermon was actually a good thing and that when one stopped being nervous it was time to start worrying. So these days instead of being caught up in my own nervousness I say this little prayer before I start to speak, it helps me:

May the words of my mouth and meditation of my heart be pleasing to you oh Lord. Amen.



Tuesday January 23, 2018

Text: Psalm 121

¹ lift up my eyes to the hills —from where will my help come? ²My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. ³He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. ⁴He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. ⁵The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand. ⁶The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. ⁷The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. ⁸The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.

As I go through life I find that this psalm resonates with me more than any other psalm. Growing up on the prairies of Minnesota, hills were hard to come by, but I have had the opportunity to travel throughout the world and have seen my share of hills and mountains all of which never failed to fill me with awe by their grandeur. To me, when I was looking up into the mountains it was as if I was looking up to see God. His wonders always filled me faith that everything would be alright. Psalm 121 speaks to the care and protection God gives to us as we go through our life journey. After all life is really one big journey, a pilgrimage if you will, and Psalm 121 give us words of comfort and wisdom to know the God is there for each of us.

Let us pray: *Oh Lord, let the words of Psalm 121 be imprinted on my heart as a prayer to you for my life's journey. Amen.*



Wednesday January 24, 2018

Text: John 1:1-5

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Just as the story of God needed a beginning so too did the story of God's only Son Jesus Christ and here John helps us to understand. Last month we celebrated the beginning of the Christ story with Christmas. Many of us are quite familiar with the traditional nativity narrative; however, the author of John's Gospel starts by connecting the beginning of Christ with God's beginning as we read in Genesis. But unlike Genesis where we hear that the Word has been with us as a force of creation, with John we hear of a new beginning as the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us and thus begins a new relationship between God and the whole world.

Let us pray: May God's work made flesh bring us all new beginnings to our story the New Year and every year. Amen.



Thursday January 25, 2018

Text: Matthew 22:34-40

³⁴When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest? ³⁷He said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' ³⁸This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Leave it to a lawyer to try to figure out the easiest way to interpret the laws of God! Yet if we are honest with ourselves, we fall short of even the most condensed simplification of the commandments to love both God with all our hearts and our neighbor as ourselves - and yet God still loves us and provides us with ways to keep trying no matter how often we fail. To me, this is the essence of God's Grace that despite our failings we are still loved and encouraged to keep striving. To me this is some serious Good News.

Let us pray: *We give thanks to God for giving us Christ who teaches and encourages us to love and allows us, through is life, death and resurrection to keep on loving even when we fail. Amen.*



Friday January 26, 2018

Text: Acts 1:7-9

⁷He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." ⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

In this world there are so many uncertainties and mysteries, so many things that we cannot know. As an example: if one tried to talk to me about quantum physics I would be baffled by the terms and clueless about the approach. Equally there are many things about God which I can't comprehend - and I am a pastor.

Yet I put my faith into something that is beyond my ability to completely comprehend and God does not leave us high and dry but gives us the Holy Spirit to guide and encourage us in our faith. As Acts reminds we receive the Holy Spirit to sustain our faith and help us to be witnesses for the world.

Let us pray: *Lord, though we may not have complete knowledge about you, please send the Holy Spirit as our guide to know and encourage us in our faith. Amen*



Saturday January 27, 2018

Text: Revelation 21:3-7

³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; ⁴he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." ⁵And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. ⁷Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

Many people have reservations about the Book of Revelation due its controversial and sometimes mysterious imagery but here is an exceptionally inspirational passage. Often this text is used for funerals and memorial services because it brings comfort during difficult times as it reminds us that God is the beginning and the end and that He wipes away all tears and takes away all pain. In a world full of sin, pain and sorrows it is a blessing to know that God will be with us from the beginning of our life and to the end of our life and even beyond our worldly pilgrimage.

Let us pray: *Lord, you who are the beginning and the end, you who comfort us in our times of sorrow and who provide us with peace; be with us in whatever we face in the New Year. Amen*

