

"WORD"  
November 11, 2018

John 1:1-5, 14-18

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Hayward United Methodist Church

Call to Worship

Jesus loves me, this I know, **For the Bible tells me so.**

Come, enter worship knowing that Jesus is king. **Let us worship God in Christ's name.**

Prayer of Invocation

**Lord Jesus, we name you ruler of life, living Word. We know ourselves to be people who are both saved and being saved, children of the kingdom, yet people still in need of grace. You are the one who reveals the truth to us, truth about God, and truth about ourselves. Help us to open our minds and hearts by the light of the Holy Spirit to your Word. Enable us to worship you with sincere and trusting hearts. Amen.**

The Word John 1:1-5, 14-18

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word was with God in the beginning. **Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word nothing came into being.**

What came into being through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light. **The Word became flesh and made his home among us. We have seen his glory, glory like that of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.**

John testified about him, crying out, "This is the one of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is greater than me because he existed before me.'" **From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace; as the Law was given through Moses, so grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ.**

No one has ever seen God. **God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made God known.**

Living the Word

I have always been a puzzle person. Picture puzzles, word puzzles and number puzzles. When you get to the last few pieces or the scramble to the hidden message, or the place where you know you have it almost done, there is an anticipation to see or know the complete answer. One of my favorite kind of puzzles when I was young was the dot-to-dot. If you are a person who likes order – this may be a favorite for you as well.

The point was to follow the numbers in order until a picture appeared and then you knew what color to use to give it the right look. You had to locate the number one, find two and draw a line, then to three and onward. After you have done a lot of puzzles, if you really concentrated, you could find the highest number and work backward to number one. I thought I was very smart the first time I did that.

The Bible is put together like a dot-to-dot puzzle. Genesis opens like this: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." From there the Old Testament puzzle is an outline of the history of the people of Israel and their relationship with God. The dots are numbered in a meandering way that is sometimes a straight line of chronological time, sometimes making pillars via rows of numbers of commandments or food advisements, sometimes circles as people relate to people (in a dot-to-dot, circles can be tricky – just like relationships...) and sometimes swirling all over the page with praise and poetry.

When we come to the New Testament, the Gospel of John brings the dots back to the starting place and goes in a direction that comes out of the previous scriptures. John's Gospel begins with "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life, and the life was the light of all people."

John begins his account of Jesus' life with the fullness of who Christ is: God made flesh; Jesus who was there in the beginning of time with God, when it all began. God didn't send Jesus to fix the Old Testament, but to draw a clearer picture of God's love for us. Jesus didn't come to erase the Old Testament, but to shed light on God and God's Word. When you meet the Old Testament God and then the New Testament God, you might wonder if we are looking at the same God. It is the same God, known more fully through Christ. John is now giving us a new understanding of the beginning.

Today as the culture likes to shorten the language to fit in text messages and twitters, new understandings come forth. "Word" is the shortened form of the phrase: "my word is my bond" which was originated by inmates in U.S. prisons. It basically means "truth." Or "to speak the truth." John's gospel was already there 2000 years ago. Jesus is the truth. Word? Word! Jesus is the grace – God's unconditional love to us. Really, I mean Word? Word! The Word is recorded for us in the printed text we call scripture or the Bible. Jesus reveals God to us through his life, teaching and legacy. In the Old Testament we tend to see more authority and law from God, but Christ came not to abolish the law, but to enlighten it and share who God truly is.

Author Josh McDowell quoted Oswald Chambers as saying 'the root of all sin is the suspicion that God is not good.' McDowell then says: "Isn't it true that somehow we've got a generation of kids—and perhaps their parents as well—who think that God is not good, that sin is attractive, and that God is a type of killjoy'

I think that's true. And that's why, in my relationship with my own children, I have hammered home the idea that within every negative sounding rule—every "Thou shalt not"—there are always two positive principles. One, God gives these rules or principles to protect us. And second, He gives them to us provide for us. He's not a cosmic killjoy who wants to take the fun out of life.

McDowell then shares this story of a high school guy who wanted to go swimming with his girlfriend at midnight. The neighbors down the block had a pool, and he knew it. So they ran down there and scaled the fence even though there were 'No Trespassing' and 'Do Not Enter' signs. Just as he hit the diving board, the girl yelled, but it was too late. There was only a foot of water in the pool. He broke his neck, and he's in therapy to this day. He didn't realize that the signs on the fence—those rules—would have protected him. (Josh McDowell, *New Man*, March/April 1995, p. 55)

God is now known as truth and grace, yet still the Authority and the Law. Jesus didn't come to change the order of the dots and numbers of the puzzle, but to shed light on the hidden message of the puzzle. The authority and law weren't given to us to make our lives difficult, but to make it easier through order. "Jesus loves me, this I know for the Bible tells me so."

"The Word became flesh and lived among us." The gospels reveal who Jesus is and through him our understanding of who the Creator is, why we are created and how we can exist in peace and relationship with each other. One of the many things that I used to ask some of my Confirmation classes do was to read the Gospel of Luke with their parents. I invite you to accept this as an advent challenge for your family as well.

Right now is a great time to get the Bible open to Luke as that Gospel begins with these words: "Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup>just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, <sup>3</sup>I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, [most excellent people of the Wisconsin North Woods] <sup>4</sup>so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed." (Luke 1:1-4)

Luke, you may remember, was a physician, and order was very important in his logical mind. The story then is drawn before you as Luke helps you travel across the dots of Advent, and right back to the beginning of time with the birth of Jesus. Again, I say this is a good time of the year to share this story with your family. As I have told many Confirmands through the years: The whole Bible can be summed up in one Word – Love.

My friend, Bill, told me of a conversation he was unwillingly apart of at work one day. As a customer was waiting for something to be delivered, he started to talk about how the Bible has been changed so many times, you don't even know what to believe any more. Bill, became unsure as to what to say to him as he went on about too many versions, people reading the wrong things into it all and the whole world is coming to an end. Bill, ended the story by sharing his belief that it isn't of so much concern which version you read, but that you spend time with the scriptures at all and are guided through the reading by your relationship with Christ. I say Amen and Amen.

How will they know? You may have begun your Biblical knowledge through the King James Version of the Bible. In it the 14<sup>th</sup> verse of John reads: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." How many of you have used the word dwelt recently? Now-a-days, we give Bibles to Third graders. They are nice, with their names in the front. They are called an Adventure Bible and they are the New International Version. In their new Bibles the 14<sup>th</sup> verse of John reads: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

When we had Confirmation classes, the teens used the Contemporary English Version, the same verse there says: "The Word became a human being and lived here with us." Sometimes I will use The Message Bible to get a little different look at the Word: "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood." While in the United Methodist Seminary, I was advised to use the New Revised Standard Version that states it this way: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us" For the most part, the versions all run parallel as they tell the story. The versions haven't been created to change God's Word, but to make it easier for us to connect the dots and teach the children as we continue on this journey together.

Charles Francis Adams, 19th century political figure and diplomat, kept a diary. One day he entered: "Went fishing with my son today--a day wasted." His son, Brook Adams, also kept a diary, which is still in existence. On that same day, Brook Adams made this entry: "Went fishing with my father--the most wonderful day of my life!" The father thought he was wasting his time while fishing with his son, but his son saw it as an investment of time. The only way to tell the difference between wasting and investing is to know one's ultimate purpose in life and to judge accordingly.

Children are a gift, not only to their parents, but with everyone they build their relations with. Raising children is also a responsibility. There is supplying a home of some sort, clothes – including mittens about now, and food - nourishment for their physical bodies. But there is much more to raising the children. We have to be sure they learn about the authority and law of God, tempered with the love of God, shown to us through Jesus.

The United Methodist have a Baptism Covenant that is shared at every Baptism: At each Baptism that I have had the honor to be a part of I have asked: 'Will you nurture one another in the Christian faith and life and include these persons now before you in your care?' And the reply has come back: "With God's help we will proclaim the good news and live according to the example of Christ. We will surround this child with a community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their service to others. We will pray for them that they may be true disciples who walk in the way that leads to life."

Quiz time: Of all of the baptisms you have been present for in your adult life, how many of those children's names can you remember? Your children and grandchildren are the easy ones...What about all of the other baptisms you have been a witness to? How many of the children that came to church and Sunday School each week are you still praying for? How many did you teach? How was your example to them? Today in the church, we do something that has been done for 5000 years. We are handing down the Word.

Set in 1953, the movie 'Her Majesty' is a coming-of-age story about Elizabeth Wakefield, a 13-year-old New Zealand girl. One of the scenes in the movie, Elizabeth goes to visit Hira an old Indian woman from the Maori tribe, the indigenous Polynesian people of New Zealand. When she arrives she finds Hira is talking to her walking stick and Elizabeth question why. Hira says, "I'm remembering who I am; where I came from with this memory stick."

Elizabeth sees the many marks on the stick as the old woman slowly runs her fingers over the story lines. "I am tracing my ancestors back over 35 generations. Each notch represents a different generation in our tribe's history. Once it was required that all Maori children memorize their entire family tree. But today young people let go of their traditions, just like that." Elizabeth then asks her: "Will you teach me your history?" Hira reaches for Elizabeth's hand and places it on the carvings of the stick.

The Bible is our Memory stick – it needs to be shared. The stories and the history are not memorized much anymore. Yet the stories, if repeated can be something that is written on our hearts. The children are eager to learn, we need to teach them. To read the Bible from page one to page something over 1000, isn't very productive – at least the first time through the book. That is not how third graders are taught in Sunday School, and hopefully not how you began to know the scriptures. But there are many ways for us to read the scriptures as adults.

How many of you regularly read the Upper Room devotional? It has celebrated over 80 years of encouraging devotional reading, including a short scripture every day. Here is the one that I read and have kept for a number of years: It fits well with this sermon: 'A Trusting Child' Luke 18:16 – "Jesus...said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs."

And then the devotional written by Beulah Prasad (Bangalore, India):

"As physicians, my colleagues and I often work among slum dwellers, even on hot and sultry days. One morning as we were administering vitamin drops, a child clung tightly to his mother, unwilling to come to us because we were strangers. When his mother chided him, he hugged her more closely; but in obedience, he finally opened his mouth to receive the health-sustaining drops.

When I saw how that child unconditionally trusted his mother, refusing to be separated from her, I remembered the scripture passage in Mark 10:13-16. I thought to myself, *This is the kind of love that Christ expects us to have.* Many times when we are faced with problems, instead of coming closer to God we move away. We may even question God's love for us. But we should ask ourselves, *When times are tough, will I be enough like a child to cling to God, trusting that God knows what's best for me?"*

**PRAYER** Creator God, help us to love and trust you with the mind and heart of a child. Amen.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY** How is my trust in God like a child's trust in a loving parent?

**PRAYER FOCUS** Children separated from their parents

The Upper Room devotionals are available for you here at the church. I hope you will consider this daily practice to know God better.

Also, Hayward UMC has Bible Study and Sunday school for all ages at this church. Discussing the scriptures with others of like minds and of differing minds, helps you to renew and refine your understandings of the Word and of God.

The scripture can be compared to a dot-to-dot puzzle. The story is still being told through us; lived through us. What happens when your dot-to-dot line runs off of the edge of the page, not finishing the puzzle? As Christians we believe that if you know Jesus, you will know God. But, if you have no knowledge of Jesus you may have no knowledge of God. Jesus was with God from the beginning. He comes into and out of our lives through the scriptures according to our willingness to accept the Word, the truth and the light. WORD!

Breakthrough Prayer: *Lord, open us to all that you would have us be for you and for others. Breakthrough into our lives and our church with new possibilities. Amen.*