

Christmas Eve – Year C – December 24, 2009
Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1:1-12; John 1:1-14
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Movie director, Steven Spielberg, once said, “People have forgotten how to tell a story. Stories don’t have a middle or an end anymore. They usually have a beginning that never stops beginning.” The greatest story ever told has its origins outside of time, and yet we hear about the beginning in both the Book of Genesis and the Gospel of John. The greatest story ever told has a distinct beginning, a time, a place in history, in the birth of Jesus, the Word made flesh. The good news for all who believe in Christ Jesus is that we have the hope and the promise of new and unending life in Him. In our own becoming, we are always in the process of beginning.

The first verses of the Book of Genesis read, “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, ... Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness” (Genesis 1:1-4). The writer of John’s Gospel clearly wants us to make the connection between God as creator and God as savior. He tells us that from the beginning of all creation the Word was God, and that through him all things came into being, most especially Life and Light. The Word is the Life that is the creative force behind all life. The Word is the Light that cannot be quenched by any power of darkness, and the true light that the darkness can never conquer. An important distinction for Martin Luther is that Jesus, the Word made flesh, is *the* Light of the world. Jesus is not merely a human word among many words. By virtue of the incarnation, Jesus is uniquely the Word of God, through whom all things were made.

You and I may have become so used to thinking that we are the authors, editors, and publishers of our own life stories that we may be tempted set aside the knowledge that there is nothing on earth that is outside of the divine gift of life. The truth is that God is the One who really deserves the credit on the book jackets of our lives. As we consider God incarnate, *the* Word made flesh, this is also a marvelous time to recall how the words of our own stories begin to become sentences, paragraphs, whole chapters even, in the grand narrative of the history of salvation. The Scriptures, confessions and doctrines, the writings of the saints, and the traditions that have formed and molded us in our faith are like a literary genealogy for us. A life written in the vocabulary and language of faith in Christ Jesus is a living testimony for our times, and leaves an eternal reference for others to seek, find and follow, so that the story may continue.

With a continuous story who could possible define the middle or predict the end? It is dynamic, alive, and growing in a truly organic way. After all, God became flesh in Jesus Christ, and the story lives on you, me, and the whole Body of Christ. Believers are also bearers and sharers in the Word. The prologue to John’s Gospel sets the scene for the whole book. God is expressing God’s self in Jesus. For what purpose and to what possible end, we may ask. The most intimate and profound revelation of God is the person of Jesus Christ. As John will later proclaim in one of the most well-known verses of Scripture, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3:16). At once, we know that this is divine and loving intervention with the end that all should believe in Him and receive the gift of salvation. In the beginning, God creates life through Love. In this new beginning, Love comes down to mediate new life by humanity’s reconciliation with God in Christ. As John puts it, “to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ... born of God” (John 1:12, 13). How fitting that we celebrate the birth of Jesus this night, and that God empowers us to become children of God through the gift of faith. Revelation and reconciliation are two sides of the same page in Christ’s book of life.

What the Word reveals it also transmits; God’s love for humanity. God’s will to create, save, and give new life results in a new community distinguished by a new means of

interrelatedness. That community is you, me, and all those who in faith, receive Christ and are reborn, becoming – always becoming -- “children of God”. The purpose of God’s presence on earth, Christ’s mission if you like, is to lead all people to life in Him. We do well this night to reflect on how the implications of the Word disturb and disorient us. It might seem like a mystery novel full of twists and turns. How many of us have negotiated the tentative night walk from the sleepy darkness of our warm beds to the blinding light of the bathroom? How many of us have stubbed our toes walking into doors or other hidden obstacles in the dark? Similarly, our movement from spiritual darkness to the light of Christ can be a complex adventure story with all kinds of roles and characters, and even a few red herrings along the way. In the light of revelation, it can be painful to see, perhaps for the first time, a true reflection of who we are without Christ, even as we give ourselves over to the power of God’s transforming grace. God always desires the very best for each of us, and with God’s help we each become the person God always intended us to be in Him. In the knowledge and love of God, how does the Word, who is eternally one with the new life stirring our hearts and minds within us, have the power to transform our lives? In other words, where is Christ at work in the world today? Where is Christ at work in you and me? When we allow ourselves to be open to God’s transforming presence, we are more aware of opportunity to serve those all around us who are vulnerable as the baby in the manger.

Martin Luther said, “There are some of us... who think to ourselves, ‘If I had only been there! How quick I would have been to help the Baby [Jesus]... We say that [with the benefit of hindsight] because we know how great Christ is, but if we had been there at that time, we would have done no better than the people of Bethlehem... [However], why don’t we do it now? We have Christ as our neighbor.” Would have, could have, should have, just doesn’t cut it! Word, or *logos*, also means mind or rationality, as well as speech and communication. As rationality, *the* Word, in living flesh, conveys the content of God’s thinking. As speech, it conveys action and realization. *Practicing God’s Graciousness* isn’t just a catchy phrase held captive in print, it means faith in action. Again and again, we have seen the many ministries of this faith community make real Christ’s goodness and grace, light and truth to a world of people still groping in darkness. From the gifts of food, clothing and other items that we have shared throughout the year with our neighbors at the Love Kitchen, and the Bread of Life Mission; to care packages for our troops; and a very special Christmas for the children of prisoners, to name but a few. As theologian Karl Barth observed, embracing the truth of God in Jesus Christ is “the beginning of all beginnings in Christian thinking and speaking... with which the Christian community approaches the world.” We believe in His name, receive Christ in our hearts, and then we are sent in Christ’s name as witnesses to God’s grace.

Let us go, therefore, in peace with faith in Christ born anew in our hearts, spelling out truth and love in all that we say and do. Let the light of Christ shine through us in word and deed, guiding others to Life and Love in His Name. Let us never forget how to tell the story. And may the greatest story ever told never stop beginning in each of us.

Amen.