

Sunday 3rd January 2021.
Reading John 1:10-18

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What a privilege it is to be speaking to you on the first Sunday of the Year. Happy new year! I wonder how your Christmas was? Different, more homely, no big parties! Hopefully still a gift or two to unwrap and a good meal! I love the present opening. The Grandchildren are so excited. "Is it time now, Grandma"? I love to watch are they tearers or careful unwrappers wanting to make the moment last? Do they look at the gift slowly or cast it aside going on to the next? Can this image of unwrapping gifts help us in our faith?

Often at this service Churches focus on a theme for the coming year, what we want to leave behind and what are our hopes and dreams for 2021. Dream as we might, this time last year, we had no idea what was coming, that we were going to be hit by a world wide pandemic and we're far from out of the woods yet. For me the last year has reinforced the fragility of our human existence. We make plans, we assume we know what's going to happen but do we? So quickly, as happened last March, the rug can be pulled from under our feet and our vulnerability is exposed. So many losses. So much sadness the consequences of which will go on for many years. We realise that our human resources just aren't enough.

Today I hope to reground us in the Hope we have to offer to the world and ourselves in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It really is good news! What a bible passage we have to consider, its one of such richness and depth. These few verses not only welcome us to John's gospel but also invite us to see life differently. There is treasure in this scripture. It reminds me of what was said when the archaeologist Howard Carter finally broke through into Tutankhamen's tomb "Can you see anything?" "Yes wonderful things, wonderful things". It was shining a lamp through a hole in a wall that enabled him to see the wonderful things. Can this reading give us light to see wonderful things in our faith?

This scripture is all about Jesus and makes 3 different kinds of statements about Him. Those that begin "He was" then "He came" followed by "He gave". It's like an unfolding. Starting with God before creation, moving to what Jesus offers us and returning to God the Father. It tells us that it's in Jesus we see what God is like because theirs is "the closest relationship".

The first 18 verses of John have been described as a "soaring symphony trying to express the inexpressible."

So no pressure here then!

He was: Jesus was with God, He was life, nothing was made without Him. He is the true light who gives light to everyone, He was in the world.

Let's pause there! Can we really take these jaw dropping phrases seriously? Jesus is life and nothing is made without Him. There is no life outside Jesus. This means there is no supernatural/ natural divide. No God up there and us down here. Everything is God given. Jesus sustains us in every breath and heartbeat. It's Jesus who gives us light to see life from God's perspective. To hope for the fullness of God's kingdom, when all will be well.

He came: He came into the world, full of Grace and truth, that when we believe in Him He gave us the "right" to become God's children, God's precious, beloved sons and daughters, with all the potential to become just like Jesus. Suppose this means just as our genetic make up is a mix of

genes from our mother and father we also contain divine DNA that just needs to be activated for us to have limitless potential.

He gave: “out of His fullness we have all received grace upon grace”. Eugene Petersen in the Message gets really excited about this. He calls Jesus the “Life-Light”, that the Son like the Father is “generous inside and out, true from start to finish”. “ We all live off his generous bounty, gift after, gift after gift.” Now that’s a different way to see life, that it’s all God’s gift.

The gift of life freely given, freely received with no conditions.

A friend recently asked Terry how much he had changed during the past year since his ordination. Although I don’t think this is what we said at the time, we came to the conclusion that the greatest change happens when our faith in Jesus goes from being intellectual to personal. Everything stems from there. When we realise Jesus is interested in and concerned about us as individuals whilst at the same time in charge of the universe and sustaining all life, it causes a shift deep within us.

So can we accept God’s invitation? If this year we could slowly keep unwrapping and looking at the gift of Jesus, then no matter what else happens, it truly will be a good year and we will see even more wonderful things.

Amen.