

Ascension Lutheran Church

Pastor Hollmann's Sermon for the week of December 14, 2008

Seeing and Knowing (John 1:6-8)

This is the holiday season, time to prepare for Christmas. And Christmas is a time to give gifts for family and friends. Let's say you're in a store. You're searching for that perfect gift to give to that perfect someone when you hear a store worker ask, "Can I help you?" "No," you say, slightly annoyed, moving back, "I'm just looking." Meaning, please leave me alone. I'm just looking around for something to buy, just looking for a gift to give.

Just looking. But to really see something, beyond just looking, well that's a different story. Looking is not the same as seeing. When you find that perfect gift, you see, you know, you understand that that's the one. You're search for the right Christmas present is over.

As we prepare for Christmas, Jesus' birth, The Holy Spirit through God's Word shows us the difference between looking at Jesus, and seeing Jesus.

To just look at Jesus means to just notice Jesus, to keep a safe distance from him. Oh, you know Jesus, really I'm just looking. Please don't bother me too much. Christmas may be Jesus' birthday, a day to remember and honour.

But when it comes to Jesus challenging, conforming, changing our distracted lives to actively serve him, when it comes to Jesus leading our lives, guiding our plans, our bank accounts, our families, well now that's getting pretty personal, pretty serious.

Beyond just looking at Jesus, to see Jesus, now that's a life long devotion. To see means to know, to understand.

To see Jesus means to understand who Jesus is. And when we begin to see who Jesus is, we begin to see who we are. When we begin to see Jesus, to know, to understand Jesus our often hectic and blurred lives come into focus.

Our Gospel reading this morning from John chapter one tells us who Jesus is. John chapter one, the prologue to the entire Gospel, gives us the big picture about Jesus. John takes us back to the beginning, to even before there was a beginning, takes us back to God himself, God who is beyond all things, God who is the origin of all things.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"

The Word here refers to Jesus Christ. Word is from the Greek, the original language of the New Testament, for "Logos." And the Greek word "Logos" can be translated as Word or Reason. Jesus is the Word or the Reason of God, someone we strive to understand, even though he is above all understanding.

“All things came into being through him, the Word, Jesus, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.”

The true light that enlightens everyone is the Word, the Reason of God, Jesus. This advent, this time of preparation for the coming of Jesus both as a baby born in Bethlehem and his coming as judge on the last day, we remember John the Baptist. John was not the light, but he came to point to the light, Jesus Christ, the light coming into the world.

As the darkness fades we begin to see the light. Each week before Christmas we light one of these candles. Soon, one by one, all will be lit. The light which enlightens us is coming.

And through this light we begin to see and understand who Jesus is, the creator made flesh, true light. And we begin to see and understand ourselves, and our need for the light, our need for Jesus.

There's a story about half way through John's gospel about seeing and knowing Jesus and seeing and knowing ourselves.

There's a man born blind who is healed by Jesus. The man who is blind doesn't know who Jesus is at first. Yet Jesus, the light of the world, gives sight to this man so that God's work may be revealed in him.

It was for God's glory that Jesus gave sight to the blind man. And the blind man later testifies that he knows one thing for sure, now he can see. Later, he finds Jesus, he knows Jesus, he worships and praises Jesus, praises and loves.

It is to the glory of God that we are given sight to see Jesus, to know Jesus.

How can you love what you don't know?

And so to the glory of God, Jesus gives sight to our sinful and blind understanding.

Jesus renews our minds by the Spirit of God to see Jesus the Saviour, Jesus who loves and cares for us. Jesus who became one of us, the Word made flesh, so that we may one day see God face to face, so that we may know and realize his grace and truth, his mercy and hope.

These words of John, words of scripture about Jesus are written that we may know Jesus, to know, and to believe to believe and to follow. And Jesus is still daily enlightening us to see and know and realize his presence in our lives. Jesus is still

challenging us to see how he is our creator, our brother, our Saviour, our leader. To see Jesus, to know and understand, to understand and follow Jesus is a life long devotion, one which often surprises us.

It's five o'clock on a Friday evening. Two friends are heading home after a long, hard week of work. It's the end of a depressing week. Things aren't going well. As they wait in the cold, in the dark, there in the snow for the bus that is never on time, they begin to talk.

They talk with one another about how bad things are. Oh, don't you know. Things just aren't like they used to be they say to each other. Nope, it's not the same. It seems like no one is around much anymore. Work is the same old, same old. Then there's the lousy, freezing cold weather. And that snow which makes such a mess and makes everything so late. Everyone is getting sick. There's gastro, the flu, infections.

There at the freezing cold bus stop, after work on a Friday night, while they talk and ramble on, someone else waiting there for the bus, asks "what are you talking about?"

They stand still, looking sad, down and out. There even a little surprised. So they tell this stranger. "Hey, haven't you heard the news?"

"Things aren't the same anymore. The economy is going down the drain, it's tough out there. The future looks bad. People are sick. It's lonely. It's hard. It's stressful. We don't know if we can make it. So we're headed home, away from it all." The stranger listens and as the bus finally comes. They get on, shuffle to their seats in the back.

Then the stranger turns to the two men, "O how slow of heart you are to believe". And there on the bus, on the way home, there in the dark, in the cold, there he begins to tell them about how we can expect many troubles in this world. There will be sickness and hard times, there will be stresses, death and grief.

But there's more than just sickness and depression, anxiety and restlessness, says this stranger. The stranger tells them that there's hope.

He tells them there's someone who has overcome the world, someone who has once and for all defeated death. Someone with big plans for us, plans for us to prosper, amazing plans for our lives together. Someone who knows our weaknesses. Someone who relates to us. Someone who has borne our griefs, carried our sorrows. Someone who empowers us to love without limit. Someone who enlightens us to see and to understand, to understand and to praise, to praise and to love.

Well when the two friends make it to their stop, they get up to go. That stranger, now their new found friend, stays in his seat. He must be waiting for the next stop. But, it's late. So the two men invite him to join them for dinner.

They get off the bus together and make it to their home. And there at home, at a normal kitchen table, this stranger turned friend takes some bread, give thanks, and gives it to them.

The guest becomes the host. Their eyes are opened. They recognized this someone as the One. The one creator, the Word made flesh, in whom is life, the light of all people. They see, they understand.

Were not our hearts burning with faith, hope, and love as he talked with us on the bus. And immediately they rush out into the cold winter night, that doesn't seem so cold and dreary anymore, they head out into the now illuminated city to praise and to tell, to tell and to serve.

Well this is an updated version of the events of Luke, chapter twenty-four, where the risen Jesus appears to two of his down and out disciples that first Easter evening. The disciples thought that Jesus ministry was all over. He died and was buried. And so they head back home to the town of Emmaus.

Jesus appeared to them on the way to Emmaus, yet they didn't recognize him. And Jesus tells them all about what the Scriptures say. That Jesus, the Messiah, would suffer and die, and on the third day be raised to life. Then, as joins them for the evening meal. The guest becomes host. Jesus reveals himself to them in the breaking of bread, the Lord's Supper, the body of Christ crucified, Christ risen.

Jesus meets us again today through the conversation of his Word and through the breaking of bread, his body given for us.

And Jesus has plans for us, plans for this church, as in Jesus, we are the light of the world, light and hope for this city. Light which shines, radiates hope from Jesus.

Jesus is the light which shows everyone the way to the Father, the way to life forever with God, the way to peace. Jesus is still engaging us in conversation through his Word on the bus, here in church, in our homes, at work.

Through the ongoing conversation found in his words of Scripture, we take part in the life long search for understanding, to know Jesus, to know who he really is. Jesus, the creator, the Saviour, the truth, the way, the light, the very peace of God, it goes on and on. For in Jesus there is grace upon grace, mercy upon mercy.

And to know, to understand Jesus means we also know and understand who we are: sinners forgiven to the glory of God, forgiven so that we will love God and love everyone.

As the candles are lit, the darkness begins to fade. Around Christmas the days get a little longer. The light shines in the darkness. The darkness has not overcome it.

Light shines on us, in us, through us. To see, to know, to know to praise, to praise to love, this is our life in the light, our life in Christ. Amen