

31 December 2023—The 1st Sunday after Christmas: John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. So begins John's Gospel. These first 18 verses are called 'The Prologue' and display a remarkable theological symbolism, cosmic perspective, and earthly implications, all in just 18 verses. The Prologue was so important in Medieval England, one widely used liturgy for the Eucharist ended with reading this passage before people departed.

The weaving of cosmic perspective and earthly result is evident in the interplay between the co-eternal Word of God and the Word taking flesh, born among us. It is also expressed in the contrast of the pre-existent Christ and John the Baptist, a very 'earthy' figure. More implicit, easily overlooked is the connection of eternity with time. More on that presently.

The Prologue testifies that mortal life has meaning and purpose. Some assume life is meaningless, one's purpose purely personal—acquiring wealth; obtaining and hoarding power; doing good deeds to feel better about oneself or pacify the hungry, hurting, and hopeless. If the universe is meaningless, the spiritual plagues of our time—greed, exploitation, and egomania; utilitarianism, nihilism, and amorality—make perfect sense. However, if there is meaning and purpose to life, then our purpose is to receive such meaning and live it.

The Prologue expresses meaning and purpose twice. Verses 2—5: *All things came into being through (the Word), 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 did not overcome it. Life is meaningful because life is intentional, not accidental. In a sense we can say God did not choose to create, God is creator; creating is to God as breathing is to us. We can also say, while darkness, that is, chaos and evil, are real, neither is creative nor lasting. Indeed, traditionally in Christian theology evil cannot create but only pervert and destroy what already exists.*

Another truth from the Prologue: creation is created for intimate union with God, known by God's revelation in Christ, through the Holy Spirit. Verses 12—14: *...to all who received (the Word), who believed in his Name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of mortals, but of God. And the Word become flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.* Because of God's merciful loving-kindness, we are becoming God's meaning and purpose. Christ came to unite us in the Holy Spirit to God for eternity.

Now, about eternity and time. In some churches the interaction of time and eternity is weighted heavily towards created time. Sins committed without repentance are understood as deciding factors of whether we are worthy of eternity, and the punishment if we are not. Yet, what if the scale is more weighted to eternity? What if God's meaning and purpose exceed our sins? It is remarkable that in John's Gospel the resurrected Jesus still bears the wounds of his execution (John 20:24-29), but now Jesus' mortal wounds testify to God's grace. In John's First Letter (3:2) we read: *Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.*

Perhaps in the age to come we, too, will bear the marks of our wounds—received and inflicted, the consequences of our aggressions, sins, and betrayals. Perhaps, in the age to come, such signs are not ugly disfigurements to hide. Perhaps they are signs of God's grace since we are being healed, and this is God's eternal purpose in Christ's love, the Holy Spirit our comforter. Perhaps we will marvel and give endless praise that God is healing everyone of all mortal wounds, by God's mercy through Christ's love, the Holy Spirit our helper. Maybe we will see others' wounds clearly and rejoice, because God in Christ and the Holy Spirit is the meaning and purpose for everyone and all. Perhaps we will weep for our sins and have unending joy that God is healing us and everyone. Perhaps we will forgive, simply because we are forgiven, and cheerfully assist others' healing because we know the delight of being healed. Why wait for eternity? Why not live more fully our meaning and purpose now? *And the Word become flesh and dwelt among us...full of grace and truth.*

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive, be yours, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, now and for ever. Amen.