

## Message: "Truth's Partnership with Grace"

1-4-26

Scripture: John 1:1-18

<sup>1</sup>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.

<sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. <sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>9</sup>The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup>He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup>But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup>who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. <sup>14</sup>And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

<sup>15</sup>(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") <sup>16</sup>From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup>The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

We made it! We made it through the year 2025! I want to say we deserve congratulations, but it doesn't feel like that word fits this particular year; perhaps we should ask for consolation? For there are so very many people hurting over all that's been going on.....perhaps we always live in dark times, but I feel they have been made much darker by the past 365 days. Perhaps you feel the same way.

But aren't you glad 2025 is over?

I've never seen such a year as 2025 - and I hear the same reaction from many. This past year was a brutal year filled with so many new wrong things, new immoral things, new illegal things, as to make the head spin. I remember when 2025 began in the most ominous of ways; there were storm clouds brewing, great hatred running things, threats and strategies and predictions that were terrifying and fearsome. It is true that many of the things we feared most did not come to pass, such as nuclear war or a collapsed economy or Kanye West leading the superbowl half-time show; but many horrible things we'd never thought could happen did indeed happen, things such as concentration camps and massive ICE

raids, White House demolition of the east wing to make room for a garish ballroom, the longest governmental shutdown in the history of our country, political assassinations on both sides of the partisan divide, and warfare and genocide in Gaza and Ukraine and Sudan - 2025 is not a year many would want to repeat.

Which brings me to a second question: Are you looking forward to 2026?

We cannot help but wonder about what lay ahead, and we cannot help but tease out predictions of the unknown future by looking at the known past. This is precisely why so many of the predictions about the upcoming year are ones of doom and gloom, rising from the fears that 2026 may indeed be as bad as, or worse than, 2025. And there's already tremendous worry about the year we just entered -- just three days in, our country's leadership has conducted a new act of war with a foreign country; we have attacked Venezuela. The sad truth is, in the year ahead, more of the same kind of recklessness and violence is likely. It's hard not to be pessimistic.

But pessimism will not help us face the new year; preparation will. Pessimism predicts the negative with no purpose but commiseration and acceptance; it tries to make one as comfortable as possible in the prison of what is assumed to be unchangeable. Preparation, on the other hand, predicts the negative for the purpose of response, to plan for and implement the eventual reversal of immoral decisions and unethical actions. The one who prepares understands the hope that always beckons outside the prison walls created by human depravity; it understands that hope is something to live into rather than simply await.

Our scripture lesson puts this perspective before all people who find themselves in the intersection times that look both backwards and forwards with intention. John chapter one is known as one of the most poetic, most resonate sections of the Bible for it expresses God's revelation as something timeless and foundational. "1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was in the beginning with God. 3All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4in him was life, and the life was the light of all people."

"The Word of God was the life and light of all people" - the message is pretty clear, that there is great power in the Word of God. The Word refers to Jesus, of course, but perhaps the reference is greater than that? Greater in the sense of broader or all-encompassing? Perhaps describing Jesus as "The Word" attests to the great power in words themselves? The power of life and light?

Perhaps words give rise to the power to change things such as perspective and attitude and alignment and heart in order to be better prepared for whatever may come? And how very much can improve with better perspectives, better attitudes, better alignments, and better hearts?

Many of you know that the recent windstorm that hit Missoula knocked down a tree that hit our house and car but didn't hurt anyone and caused relatively little damage; even our dog remained asleep on the couch during the whole affair. What I didn't tell you was that the tree belonged to our next-door neighbors, an elderly couple we've known for a long time. I should mention here that we have very good neighbors in our neighborhood, and this couple who live next door have always been good neighbors to us. This being the holidays, they were not at home when the tree fell and so had to check on things from a couple of state's distance away. This meant phone calls - several phone calls, as it turns out. I looked on my phone recently and discovered that in a timeframe of just a few days they called me 17 times just to make sure we were OK, to check on the damage to our home, to see how clean-up efforts were going, and to arrange needed repairs and replacements. I could sense something else in their voices, however, almost as if they were worried we'd be mad at them for having their tree fall on our property, or that we were frustrated with having to deal with things while they were away from the neighborhood. None of those things entered our minds, but I could sense in those phone calls that our neighbors needed one thing more than anything else - they needed reassurance. In those calls where we talked, I can remember speaking tremendously powerful words to them, words like "it's OK" and "No problem" and "we'll take care of it" and "I was looking forward to using my chainsaw again" - I spoke a lot of words like these, simple words but at the same time powerful words, words of reassurance that we were with them in this, that we thought no less of them, and that the reality that takes our breath away can always be dealt with if we care about each other.

Can you hear the same kind of message from God spoken to us today and everyday? Can you hear God speaking to us, saying "I am with you?" Can you hear God saying "I won't leave you?" Can you hear God saying "We'll figure things out together?" God is speaking these words to us now, just as he speaks to all who orient their hearts to hear; God spoke this word through Jesus long ago; God speaks this word today in Christ's body, the church; God speaks this word in any and all who live the pattern of love set by God's son; God speaks in these ways, and will never be silent.

And perhaps that's the kind of message we need to ground ourselves in these days of human-caused storms that destroy and mangle reality - the messages of reassurance that come from God. That's what John chapter one is all about; there is a God who shares with the world the reassurance that he is with us in our world, whatever is going on, however bad the year before has been, however challenging the year ahead will be. God's reassurance took the form of the manger birth 2,000 years ago, an event shrouded by the reassurance of the angels speaking to Joseph and Mary and the shepherds and wise men saying "do not be afraid, for God is here." God's reassurance was given to us in the life of Jesus, a mystery we still ponder but in our ponderings we receive the benefit of grace, of God joining us where we are and how we are to help us along. To know God is with us regardless of what happens in our lives or the world provides us the reassurance we need to carry on; we discover that we can always deal with whatever reality throws our way as we care for each other as God cares for us.

"In the beginning was the Word of God, and the Word of God was the light of all people." The passage reminds us that, in all times, at the beginning of creation and before, and at the end of all things and beyond, God is the one constant in the midst of all of creation's variables. God has been; God is; and God shall be. And God has an excessive hope for the world that God invites us to take as our own - a light that shines in the darkness, any darkness, all darknesses, a light that cannot ever be snuffed out by anything or anyone. This is the word of God, a light shining come what may. It is a word spoken to us in the life and teaching of Jesus; it is a word meant to be constantly repeated. And that's how to remain hopeful in this upcoming year.