

W - Witness in Wonder O - the One who R - Redeems & D - Delivers

It is the day after Christmas. The day after we celebrate Christ coming into the world. The day after giving and receiving gifts in His name.

But today is today; not just the “day after”. Yes, in England and some parts of Canada and Australia, its officially Boxing Day when visits to friends are encouraged and there’s a second day of no work and all play. But today is not just a day for boxing up presents to be returned, or boxing up boxes to store.

Today is the Sunday, the first day of the week following a very special day indeed. But today is special in its own right. For today we are given the ultimate gift, as told to us by the eloquent pen of John. I’ve brought a drawing that hangs over my desk at home, as inspiration and remembrance of this great Gospel writer.

John is my favorite Gospel writer for the way that he writes. His descriptions of our Lord, of the dynamic relationships he had with the apostles and disciples, with the cultural and governmental leaders of the day -- that is what makes John my favorite. He not only told the facts, but he told them with regard to how it related to real people in real times, living real lives.

Christmas can be a time of fantasy. A time when, appropriately, rifts try to be set aside in families and love can be seemingly overflowing. And holiday dinners can strive to look like Norman Rockwell paintings or Hallmark commercials, but reality is often different. So often we want to put aside the ills of this world that we want to live in the fantasy of a Christmas culture that may or may not be real. I pray we all had some lovely moment or moments of the past few days that we can treasure as a warm spot in our collective Christmas memory. But today, reality hits. A good reality! And I ask you to join me in celebrating that God’s reality is taking hold. These first 18 verses of John’s Gospel tell the complete story that we need for edification as we are called to live every day in God’s world as Christmas. Not a marketable Christmas fantasy, but the Christmas reality that God is with us. Today, the day after Christmas, is the day we can remember and celebrate as the first full 24 hours when Jesus lived amongst us. He was born sometime on Christmas Day, but today we have a full 24 hours in which to remember he lives! And we remember the next 24 hours and the next 24 -- they are all filled with Christ’s presence.

Our lectionary by including this wonderful passage from John reminds us that God is with us. God is in relationship with us. And God remains with us and guides us every step of the way into this first day of reality and every day of our lives henceforth.

In the beginning was the Word / In the beginning there was light. How John plays his first passage of his gospel against the first chapter of Genesis: There is darkness, and then there is light. There is darkness as we live in God’s world, and then there is light. The people who lived in darkness have seen a great light. His name is Jesus. To stand in wonder of the Almighty God, the only God in world history who came into the world as we know it as a human.

This first beautiful segment of John's Gospel can easily be broken down into 4 distinct paragraphs. The first is perhaps the most familiar:

In the beginning was the **W**ord, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, 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.

Many people get depressed around the holidays and for some it begins this "day after" when all the anticipation of a beautiful holiday is gone. With the torrential rains of the last week, it was easy to slip into a melancholy feeling even in a special holiday week. At any time, we can sit and feel surrounded by darkness. And God is with us there too. Sometimes, and I speak from personal experience with this as I'm sure some of you can too, when life is at its darkest, God's presence can be more keenly felt. Sometimes He may feel absent or removed -- sometimes vastly removed from a situation -- but looking at life in the rearview mirror, we can look in wonder that He was with us in the depths and will lead us, help us, yes, even lift us out of the darkness if we depend on Him alone. Darkness cannot overcome God's presence....*ever*.

So let us stand with John in Witness and Wonder at God's presence, through Jesus, in our lives. His presence that is very real and tangible in our lives if we stop this day, this first day of the rest of the week. The first day of the rest of your life, as a familiar saying popular 30 or 40 years ago. But it is true. And remember that God is with us. God incarnate. Emmanuel.

There was a man sent from the **O**ne true 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.

As a child on Christmas, as the shepherds stood in awe, as the angels revealed in...the wonder of it all. We can stand in wonder and thanksgiving that the One came onto earth and into our lives. The most transformative event in the history of the world that continues to change our lives to this day still, if we allow it to. For when Christ comes into your life and your heart receives the magnitude of his coming to save Your life...from where you sit today, he is with you. God predicted it for ages through the prophets. And now 2000 years later we witness it still.

The third segment of John's passage:

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who **R**eceived him, 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 man, but of God.

The fact that the one Almighty God sent his Son into the world so that we might Receive Him and be Redeemed. Now this word, redeemed, often confuses and perhaps even scares a few of us. What does that mean? Some of you have seen my silly license plate: "RADRevd" Now the reverend part, you probably get. But this plate was given to me by my first youth group when the word "Rad" -- short for radical" -- was very hip to say. And the group decided that a women priest who drove a convertible was definitely "rad" -- hence the plate. But over the years RAD also has come to mean to me, "Redeemed And Delivered".

This is the gift this boxing day is for you. We know where we are going, we know to whom we belong and how we are to know, to live, to love, to be...with Him. By His presence, by our faith, we are redeemed and delivered.

Christ coming into the world was an extraordinary, Wonder-filled event. The **One** who created us in the beginning, came into the world to remind us of the saving power of the One, Almighty God. When Jesus died on the cross, he **Redeemed** each and every one of us. Our sins of this life are forgiven and if we allow him to reign as the ruling force in our life, our lives now and in eternity are spent with him.

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. (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.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. (We have been **Delivered**.) The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 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.

So we are given the gift of redemption, of ever lasting life. And if we believe this to be true, now and on the last day, we are **Delivered**. We are set free by the power of the one who creates, the one who redeems and the one who sanctifies our lives by the Spirit. We are free to stand in **Wonder**, with the **One** who **Redeems** and **Delvers** us. You're free to worship the Christ who was in the beginning and will be with us in the End.

In Jesus name, we pray, Amen.

The Rev. Lisa Rotchford Golden, December 26, 2010, St. Andrew's, Fullerton