

January 3, 2021  
Second Sunday after Christmas

“Starting Over Again, and Again, and... Again”  
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake

*Scripture Readings:*

*Jeremiah 31:7-14*

*7 For thus says the Lord:  
Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,  
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;  
proclaim, give praise, and say,  
“Save, O Lord, your people,  
the remnant of Israel.”*

*8 See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,  
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,  
among them the blind and the lame,  
those with child and those in labor, together;  
a great company, they shall return here.*

*9 With weeping they shall come,  
and with consolations I will lead them back,  
I will let them walk by brooks of water,  
in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;  
for I have become a father to Israel,  
and Ephraim is my firstborn.*

*10 Hear the word of the Lord, O nations,  
and declare it in the coastlands far away;  
say, “He who scattered Israel will gather him,  
and will keep him as a shepherd a flock.”*

*11 For the Lord has ransomed Jacob,  
and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.*

*12 They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,  
and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord,  
over the grain, the wine, and the oil,  
and over the young of the flock and the herd;  
their life shall become like a watered garden,  
and they shall never languish again.*

*13 Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,  
and the young men and the old shall be merry.  
I will turn their mourning into joy,  
I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.*

*14 I will give the priests their fill of fatness,*

*and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty,  
says the Lord.*

**John 1:1-5**

*In the beginning was the Word  
and the Word was with God  
and the Word was God.*

*2 The Word was with God in the beginning.*

*3 Everything came into being through the Word,  
and without the Word  
nothing came into being.*

*What came into being*

*4 through the Word was life,  
and the life was the light for all people.*

*5 The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness doesn't  
extinguish the light.*

**“Someone I loved once gave me a box full of darkness.  
It took me years to understand that this, too, was a gift.”  
~Mary Oliver**

Sermon “Starting Over Again, and Again, and... Again”

Epiphany is all about light, the light coming into the world. But I don't think I am alone when I say I actually love darkness. I love the night. The smell of campfires, hot coffee and laying on blankets looking at the stars, night fishing, owls, howls, honking geese and crickets.

I love walking in the woods on a full moon where you can see like it is the middle of the day. I love flowers that bloom at night like moon flowers and evening primrose.

So when darkness is used as a metaphor for something bad, like it is in the Johanian scripture, something that we need to be cured of, moved out of, rescued from I always think of these things I love about the dark.

Not to mention how problematic this kind of dualistic thought of white as good, dark as bad, white hat, black hat, you get the picture. This thinking has set up an archetype with far reaching symbolism in how we perceive life and others.

It is literally black and white thinking that plagues us as a people. Thinking that things have to be one way or the other and never in between.

But life isn't that simple and trying to hold on to that kind of either or, right or wrong, good or bad, black or white, night or day can make one an easy target to be manipulated, desperately and fearfully short sighted and angry at those that expose the gray areas and push us to deal with the complex realities of life.

This good or bad thinking divides us more than unites us and can cause us to judge ourselves and others as either bad or good not a beautiful blend of both.

So my mind does this instant rework with things like this in scripture. I think of the light not as white but as full spectrum light, a dynamic mixture of all the wavelengths of colors and energies that pour down on us from the cosmos.

In that light that includes the deep purples of ultraviolet light, X-rays, and infra red, in that complexity I can find hope. That God will lead us all out of those places that seem to lack God's energy and love.

Plato was actually the father of that kind of dualistic imagery when he talked about people being stuck in the dark of a cave of ignorance. They needed to be rescued from the dark and once rescued they should go back and save the others. That was when we started seeing the world in opposites. But Jesus didn't think like that and often pointed out the faults with that kind of rigidity.

So if you think about it, this first paragraph of John doesn't seem to reflect who Jesus really was. Someone who came into the world and indeed brought new life and energy, but who also gave the world a chance to start over again and again and follow the law of love not the rules of right or wrong, in or out, clean or unclean, light or dark but that gray area of loving people unconditionally and not judging them.

Following Jesus means that we love people who aren't perfect, who are considered low lives by others, untouchables, unreachable, those who often live in the margins.

That's who the light of the world was and is, someone who ate with tax collectors and sinners and rebuffed the ones who sat at the head of the table judging everybody, the ones who practiced their religious rituals perfectly but didn't give a hoot about their neighbor.

And when we dig even deeper into this scripture something else is revealed. The greek word Logos. "In the beginning was the "Word." The "Word" in greek is "Logos". We actually don't have a word in the English language that is enough for this word.

I grew up believing that meant the "Bible", "The Word of God" but it is far more complicated than that. In Jesus' time and language it was more of a concept than a word. It is defined as:

"A principle originating in classical Greek thought which refers to a universal divine reason, immanent in nature, yet transcending all oppositions and imperfections in the cosmos and

humanity. An eternal and unchanging truth present from the time of creation, available to every individual who seeks it.”

I remember my Professor of Greek said it was like God’s blueprint for the universe. God’s intention and vision made manifest in the likes of Jesus.

Such a lofty thing for a baby born in a barn to a homeless couple. But there you have it. Always expect the unexpected when you claim to be a follower of Jesus.

What a fitting scripture for the start of the new year. A much desired, long awaited, new year. Now we can begin again and leave it all behind... right? Or are we destined to repeat the same mistakes.

I think it is up to us, up to us to do things differently. I heard this saying. “Nothing changes if nothing changes.”

When I read through the Jeremiah text I have to say I got a little discouraged. Here’s this guy 25-2600 years ago that is saying all the things that prophets have been saying all along.

He couldn’t stand religion that just stood to serve itself and didn’t care about the poor, the left behind, hungry, pregnant, widowed, lame and orphaned.

He was preaching all the time about how people had abandoned the principles laid out by God about caring for one another and loving God.

If you think preachers shouldn’t be political you would not have liked this guy or any of the prophets for that matter. For they always became political for the same reasons. It wasn’t about power it was about how power was used.

Were there people starving? Were there children who were enslaved? Was there mistreatment of the widows, did leaders care about the poor? This was always the motive of the prophets; to make political and religious leaders see and respond to the suffering of God’s people.

Jeremiah railed and wailed against the powers of the day to get them to listen to the needs of the people in their charge.

What was discouraging when I reread Jeremiah is that prophets and preachers and poets have been saying this stuff for so long yet nothing seems to change.

But who’s to say if humanity would still exist if there had not been prophets who stood up and said, “no way, that is not okay, we can do better, God wants more from us.”

If we can continue to speak out and follow in this prophetic tradition of Jeremiah and Jesus we can keep being a part of evolving humanity.

If we can keep doing what we know to be God's will, keep loving our neighbor no matter who they are, no matter if they love us back. If we can keep wailing and railing at governments and institutions when they turn a deaf ear to suffering, then, over time, we will begin to resemble the blueprint of God's imagination.

We will begin to be the fulfillment of God's Logos in this world. There's a new year's resolution for you. If somebody asks what your resolution is just say, "hmm.. I think I am going to try and be the fulfillment of God's Logos in this world".

We want to end this sermon with a song we wrote that sums up the meaning of epiphany for both us.

"Be Christmas"

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Be the innkeeper saying "yes" in the night  
Be the husband who will not leave her side  
Be the gentle hands that cradle this gift  
Be the aching world that finally lets God in

Be the greatest love the world can ever know  
Be Christmas wherever you go.

Be the moment when the word becomes flesh  
Be the hope lying there in the crèche  
Be the human becoming divine  
Be the eastern star shining for the wise  
Be the greatest love the world can ever know  
Be Christmas wherever you go

Be justice, love kindness, walk humbly, remind us  
We are not alone, you call us all your own  
So go tell it on the mountain, go tell  
God with us, Immanuel  
Be the greatest love the world can ever know  
Be Christmas wherever you go

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