

"The Word"

John 1:1-18

January 2, 2011

A woman was bragging to her husband: "I don't want to brag, but here it is February and I've kept every one of my New Year's resolutions. I've kept them in a manila folder in the back of my desk!" So There is a good suggestion regarding the keeping of those New Year's resolutions that you just made.

Well, it is a new year A new beginning. It always feels a bit weird for me to go through the end of one year and enter into a new year. There is always a little bit of excitement as though something monumental is about to happen. I struggle with the desire to stay up to see the old year out and the beginning of the new year because even though there is something important about those transitional times, I also know that it is just a very human designation of time. Like the transition from one month to the next ... Or one week to another ... Or even one hour, minute, or second to the next nothing necessarily significant will be different from one day to the next even if it is at the change of a calendar year.

Still new beginnings are important. They remind us that the old can give way to the new. They show us that we can set the past in the past and enter into something new. And as we enter into the new I am really glad that we do so with these opening words from the Gospel according to John.

"In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God, and the Word was God." I have long felt that these are among the most poetic and powerful words of scripture. I am not exactly sure why I have felt that way because I don't really understand completely what it is that John is trying to tell us. But I am convinced that at the very core of what we are being told is that God is present in all of our new beginnings. And to me that is encouraging. God is present in this beginning just as God has been present and active in all new beginnings.

The words of this Gospel text point me back to the very beginning. The creation account in the opening of the book of Genesis tells us that God was the force behind that beginning. "In the beginning God created" And perhaps the most fascinating part of that creation story for me is the fact that God simply spoke. And what God said came into being. What amazing power that Word of God had and continues to have. Where there was darkness The Word brought light. Where there was chaos, The Word brought order. Where there was nothing, The Word brought life.

As I was doing some reading about this text from John's Gospel I ran across a part of a sermon by a pastor named Paul Flesner which said: **"If John's Gospel were the only one we had, this is all that we would know about Jesus' birth: before his name was Jesus, his name**

was the Word, and he was with God from the very beginning of creation, bringing things into being, making things happen, shining light into the darkness.

He was God's self, God's soul, God's life force in the world. He was the breath inside all living things. He was the electric spark that charged peoples' hearts. He was the fire inside the sun. He was the space between the stars. He was the axis around which the galaxies spin.

John goes on to say that not everyone got that message. Many were blinded by this light and preferred the darkness they knew to the light which they did not know. The Word sidled up to them and hummed life into their ears, but they cleared their throats and walked away. So God decided to speak in a new way. God decided to speak body language. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us -- full of grace and truth."

All of that is beautiful Still it is a little deep for me to get my mind around. I don't understand how God can create with a Word or how that Word can become human. I don't understand how God can be a part of everything in creation. But then, I guess there is no reason that I need to understand. All I need to understand is that God has incredible power And the Word that God speaks has authority to accomplish what that Word says. All I really need to know is that the Word is Jesus. Jesus who comes to love and guide and save. Jesus who forgives and heals. Jesus who is the very sound of the voice of God. No wonder that Jesus is the place that we can know God. The Word became flesh, full of grace and truth! And think of this, 'we have had the opportunity to behold God when we encounter this Jesus in the Word of scripture.

As I think and write and share these thoughts they all seem a bit mystical and other worldly. I try to imagine what it is that God is trying to communicate to us on this 2nd day of this new year 2011. What is God's Word for us here in Bottineau in the cold and dark of this winter season that has left us with too much snow and the discouragement that goes with the drifting and shifting white stuff. Now maybe you are among those people who love the snow if you are - rejoice and share your joy with as many as you can. For the purposes of this sermon, I just wanted to use the snow as an image of the cold and dark ... the discouragement that can so often fill our days. It seems that there is too much of that - often life is just a little too cold and hard - the darkness that the scriptures suggest that we too often love more than the light is at times very pervasive. It can weight us down ... discourage us ... make it hard for us to see the possibilities that exist even in new beginnings.

What is so powerful about these scriptures is that they talk about the grace that comes with this Word from God. Did you notice the "grace" in the texts. The word that became flesh is full of grace and there is grace and grace and grace! In fact, what Paul in his letter to the Ephesians tells us is that God "lavishes" grace upon us. Grace upon grace. Overflowing, enough for everyone and every situation and still some left over, poured out with abandon. Grace is the very word of God that comes into the darkness and brings new beginnings. Those new beginnings are possible only because God is gracious and God's Word continues to bring light and life.

May you know the grace and light and life that God wants for all of God's people in the year ahead - watch for God to lavish His grace upon you.

AMEN