

Sermon for Sunday, December 28, 2008

First Sunday of After Christmas

By Tim Ljunggren

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| First Lesson | Jeremiah 31:15-17 |
| Psalm | Psalm 124 |
| Second Lesson | Revelation 21:1-7 |
| Gospel | Matthew 2:13-18 |

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ...”

Words. Many words pummel us and fall at our feet, but they have no power to change our lives in any significant way. Yet, today we’re reminded of the majestic power of words, and of one Word in particular. Jesus is the Word in the telling of which God comes among us. In the telling, God. ...

But how are we to tell?

This particular Word is spoken not so much with our lips, but by our lives, but only if we hear the Word with our hearts. The consequence of hearing the Word is that the light of our faith shines in all that we do to embrace the other. Christ has broken down the dividing wall of hostility and offered a way of unity. By recognizing the promise which comes in Christ, we are turned from ourselves and brought into new life with other in love.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ...”

How difficult it is to affirm this Word, to hold it in our hearts and in the “practical” matters of our lives. We’re tempted at every turn to run from the promise of life given in the birth of Christ, because we really prefer to invent our own answers to the problem of life. We turn away from gazing at this Christ who has come into the world and focus on ourselves, and in the process we lose our way. In seeking to inspire ourselves, we lose sight of who actually breathes life into us. In Christ there is no east or west, no north or south—but we run into constant trouble because we hear the Word not as wisdom, but as an affront to our own individualism. Even the call to share the bread and the wine at the altar can

become a call that frightens us because it can seem so naïve. The promise that we're all one through baptism, incorporated into the body of Christ, can make us run in the other direction.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ...”

The Word comes to relieve us of our self-centeredness, but we're not prepared to hear it until we learn that we can't live all by ourselves. What is called for is not a radical independence (or, more to the point, a radical willingness to leave others when we can't get our way), but a radical willingness to give up our very image and idea of ourselves into the hands of God, to float free in the creative power of God, to be upheld only by God's sustenance. When Christ comes among us, this is the Word he bears: what life we have is given by God, and so we're called to give our lives back to God.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ...”

So we come to this altar this morning, to the bread and wine, broken and poured out for us. The Word speaks them into being as more than just simply bread and wine. The Word calls them the body and blood of Christ. In this meal, then, we receive the promise of our own place as words of God. The Word embraces the bread and the wine and brings them into another reality. The same Word embraces us as well, and brings us to that same reality, but only if we're open to the Word itself.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ...”

Amen. ...

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