

**Weekend of Sunday, January 3, 2021**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Christmas/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year B**  
**First Reading: Jeremiah 31:7-24**  
**Second Reading: Ephesians 1:3-14**  
**Gospel Reading: John 1:[1-9] 10-18**  
**Sermon Title: “All Part of God’s Plan”**

## **Theme**

*Within the gospel reading’s profound words lies the simple message that God is revealed in a human person. Though we may try to understand how the Word existed with God from the beginning of time, the wonder we celebrate at Christmas is that the Word continues to dwell among us. Christ comes among us in the gathered assembly, the scriptures, the waters of new birth, and the bread and the wine. Through these ordinary gifts we receive the fullness of God’s grace and truth.*

## **Text**

[<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.

## Sermon

Currently, I drive a 2014 Ford Fusion that I bought used when it had 12,000 miles on it. It now has 120,000 miles on it. I am not a paid spokesperson for Ford, but honestly, in 40 years of owning cars, this is the best car I've ever had. It has never had any major repairs, just routine maintenance that I have done at Fairway Ford, mainly because they are right around the corner from where I live, so it's convenient for me. Everything still works, the seats have a little wear but still look nice. The body also has a little wear but still looks nice. As a person who depends on his car, I've considered trading it off on something newer, but maybe you've heard that expression, "Better the devil you know than the devil you don't"? I could get a newer car and be disappointed in it, and besides, I like not having a car payment.

What is never going to happen is that Ford is going to call me and tell me that for being a long-time loyal customer, they want to give my car a free makeover – new paint and an engine overhaul – just because that is how things ought to be.

The reason I am telling you that is because of the Second and Gospel Reading for today – just hang in here with me.

In the Gospel Reading, the Disciple turned Apostle, John wrote how things began. He didn't start with a beautiful nativity story including Mary and Joseph and an innkeeper and angels and shepherds. No, John started his Gospel before then - way before then. He started with, "In the beginning." In the beginning of what we might ask? In the beginning of all there is, John might answer – a concept that has confounded human beings forever.

And then excluding the short passage about John the Baptizer, John wrote this beautiful description of Jesus Christ, though he waited till verse 17 to actually call him by name.

John's Gospel is like no other, and it is beautiful in its own way, and if I could sum it up in my own words, I might say that:

- 1) God has always been
- 2) Jesus Christ, the Son has always been God

3) God revealed in Jesus Christ has always been a part of God's plan to reconcile creation, that God created out of love.

Remembering that John was a disciple who walked with Jesus, who witnessed his preaching and teaching and his performing signs and miracles, who probably asked Jesus questions concerning the issues he wrote about, we have to conclude that John's testimony is true and informed by his first-hand eye-witness experience with Jesus. According to John, the way he wrote the beginning of his Gospel is the way the universe, and more specifically, the world began.

Moving ahead several years to the post-resurrection apostolic era ministry of Paul, and specifically, his letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote that before the foundations of the world were laid, God in Christ chose us "to be holy and blameless" (:4). How are you doing with your "holy and blamelessness"? I can only speak for myself, and my answer would be, not so well. Paul and I are brothers here. Allow me to quote Paul from Romans 7:15-19:

Romans 7:15 I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup>Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup>But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>18</sup>For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. <sup>19</sup>For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.

Yes, Paul and I are brothers when it comes to sinful behavior. I believe I can count you in that brotherhood too.

So we have a problem, a sin problem. Though we were created out of God's great love, that great love included the ability to choose to love God back and be obedient to God's will – or not. And when we choose anything but to love God and be obedient to his will, we sin.

There is a lot of confusion in popular culture about sin. Most people think that sin is all about the big stuff, primarily breaking one of the Ten Commandments. Popular culture either doesn't know how Jesus expanded the meaning of the Ten Commandments, or chooses to ignore it. But God cares about every facet of our lives and delights when we choose to love God with godly living, and conversely,

God is so holy that God cannot bear to look at us when we sin (Habakkuk 1:13). Heaven, the final destination for all that God created, the new heaven and earth, was closed by human sin. So you see, we have a problem. We have a big problem, and that big problem is sin, and that big problem of sin has caused a huge insurmountable chasm between us and God. And there isn't anything we can do about it.

Well, Paul reminded his readers that the story does not end with our sin, in fact, the opposite is true. The real story of God with human beings began with our sin. In verse five, Paul wrote that though we were sinners destined for hell, through Christ, we are *destined for adoption*, and it was the Father's *good pleasure* to do so. We have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, forgiven of our sins, and by Christ's work alone we *are* once again, *holy and blameless!* Though we were formerly stained by sin, through Christ we get a spiritual makeover, and the gate to eternal life that was closed by human sin, has been opened by Christ!

Now I could end the sermon here, but that would be bringing the gospel without the law.

So then, what are we to do? I'm so glad you asked, because Paul answered that most important question too. And on this first Sunday of 2021, as we ponder resolutions for the New Year, we should consider this: Paul wrote that we are to live for the praise of God's glory. Not could, or should, or might, or intend to, he said we *are to* live for the praise of God's glory.

*Pause*

Ford built a car that I wanted and to achieve my objective of driving it, I paid them a lot of money. The contract is done. After that, I can choose to maintain the car and hope and pray it serves me well. Or I can choose to ignore it and use it as a means to an end. Should it break down, rust, fall apart, Ford is not going to fix it for me.

We cannot put a price on our mortal and spiritual lives. At the very root of things, life is all we really have. When it comes to the care of our lives, some of us do better than others, but as we often confess, "we are born into sin and cannot free ourselves." But unlike our relationships with our cars and our car's manufacturers,

God has *not* chosen to wash his hands of us after creation. No matter what we make of our lives, God has seen to it that there is redemption and restoration and eternal life for those who simply confess that his Son Jesus is Lord and the forgiver of sins through his death on the cross.

As a result of our confession of faith, we ought to live for the praise of God's glory. Not because we *have to to earn eternal life*, because that is not possible. But we ought to live for the praise of God's glory *because* God has saved us.

You know, I get at least five calls a week from people trying to sell me aftermarket extended warranty insurance for my car. Do you get those calls too?

God has no new deals for us. The once and done deal for us was Jesus Christ. He is all we will ever need.

### **Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

Let us resolve this year to live lives that praise God's glory. Not because we have to to win our own salvation, but in thankfulness, for the salvation God in Christ has already won for us.

### **Prayer**

Lord God of our salvation, we give you thanks for the gift of Jesus Christ, our Savior. As we enter a new year, we ask that you would send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen us in our resolve to live lives that bring you the glory you are do. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen