

First Sunday of Christmas  
Year C  
December 27, 2009  
John 1:1-18

In the name of One God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

My 90-year-old grandfather has had a tough go of it this year, having recently been in and out of the hospital with kidney trouble, pneumonia, and an aneurysm. As he enters his tenth decade of life, he is getting physically weaker. Several weeks ago, his most recent fall landed him in the hospital, where doctors were concerned that he had sustained a significant head injury during his fall.

Upon his arrival in the hospital, several doctors crowded around him to do their initial evaluations. As he does with most of his patients, the neurosurgeon began by checking to see if my grandfather had an understanding of why he was in the hospital. He asked my grandfather if he could please describe his current medical state.

“Well,” my grandfather quipped, answering with a dose of his dark humor and awful clarity, “it seems that I am in a state of rapid decomposition.”

Again, that was several weeks ago. My grandfather recovered from his fall and since that time, has celebrated his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in style with a party attended by over 45 friends and family members.

Then, this past weekend he sat at the head of the dinner table, enjoying a delicious Christmas feast, with family around him in every direction – including both his children, and several of his grandchildren and great grandchildren.

I always find it poignant to watch my grandfather and my grandmother and my nieces and nephews – separated in years by almost a century – share smiles and love between them.

Yesterday my ten-month-old niece was held up to my grandfather so that he could put into her hands an envelope that contained her Christmas present. Of course, she immediately tried to eat it, but my sister was able to intercept it and get it into her purse before too much damage was done.

Now, my grandfather may still feel he is physically in a “state of rapid decomposition” but the truth of the matter is that he is in the same spiritual state that his ten-month-old great granddaughter is in.

As they sat together, they were separated in age by decades, one is ten months into her life and one is nearing the end of his. Yet, in a sense they are both at the same point spiritually – they are both becoming. Specifically, they are both in the process of becoming children of God.

My ten month old niece and my 90 year old grandfather will wake up tomorrow and begin another day of becoming. And so will we.

Whether we are in our twenties and living away from home for the first time, whether we are aging and facing declining health, whether we are taking our first steps or learning to read, whether we have just been baptized or confirmed, whether we are handing our keys over to our teenage children to take the car to the mall, or are the teenagers ourselves, whether we are watching our kids grow up and get married, or are grieving over relationships that didn't work out, we are all always in a state of becoming. We will wake up tomorrow and begin another day of becoming.

To live is to become.

And to live in relationship with God, is to become a child of God.

The beginning of the Gospel according to John contains this promise, “to all who received [Christ], who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.”

As soon as I read this sentence, I knew I had to preach on it. The entire prologue to this Gospel is gorgeous and the thought of preaching on it is intimidating - to say the least.

And, maybe I should have zeroed in on the phrase “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” for it provides us with the cosmic context of the stable scene in Bethlehem.

But, I couldn't get away from this other phrase and the more I studied it, the more apparent it became that the message of hope and joy given to us through the incarnation and the faithful response required by the Christian community, is as embedded in this phrase, as it is anywhere in the prologue.

The Gospel says, “to all who received [Christ], who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.”

The phrase rolls off the tongue smoothly.

And it sounds familiar.

We understand the phrase “believe in”

We say every Sunday at the beginning of the Nicene Creed: We believe in one God.

But what is really interesting is that if you look at it closely, a better translation of the Greek phrase “to all who believed *in* his name” would be “to all who believed *into* his name.”

There is a preposition in the original Greek that carries a sense of direction and motion that is missed in the English translation. (Brian Peterson New Proclamation p 52).

As one scholar puts it “The life of faith is one of continual movement deeper and deeper into Jesus, and into the relationship shared between the Father and the Son. In John's Gospel, discipleship means an eternal journey into the depths of that love which has no end.” (Peterson p 52)

When we think about our spiritual lives – our spiritual becoming - how might our understanding change if we were to think about believing into God, rather than believing in God?

It helps me consider my faith not in terms of ascribing to a certain doctrine, but living into a certain reality.

To become children of God is to journey deeper and deeper into the love of God, a love illustrated by the intimacy and closeness described here between the Father and the Son. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The image suggested by the text is one in which the Word lies in the bosom of God, turned toward God, oriented in one direction only.

And then the prologue continues – the Word becomes flesh and dwells with us here on earth.

His life became the light of all people.

We are invited *into* the light, as we are invited to believe *into* the name of Christ. As we are empowered to become children of God.

We are invited to enter into the light that is brought to us from the very center of God. Light that travels from God's heart to enkindle our own. Light that scatters the darkness all around us.

For many Christmas is a time of great joy. A time to see family and friends, to reconnect, and to rest.

Yet for others Christmas can be a reminder of painful memories and failed relationships. It can be a time of fear. It can be a time where disconnection and loneliness is particularly acute. For some this is a dark season.

But we hear and we trust that this darkness will not overcome the light which shines all around us.

The darkness is NOT the final word.

The final Word has entered into our world. He dwells with us in the darkness. He brings light and life.

Even when it may be hard to see the light, we know it is there. We may have to look harder for it, but that too is part of the faith journey. Looking for the light is part of our responsibility as followers of Jesus Christ.

The darkness will not overcome the light; we know that.

But at the same time the light will not overcome us - God's love for us is like the love a parent has for his or her child.

The love God has for us is a love that demonstrates a certain restraint. Though it is perhaps painful, risky and scary, this love allows us to become – to grow into who we are to be.

God is not overpowering us with God's love.

Instead, God is empowering us with it.

God gives us, as we hear today, the power to become children of God.

We will wake up tomorrow and begin another day of becoming.

We will wake up tomorrow and begin another day of believing into that promise of love, shown to us in the incarnation of the Word made Flesh, Jesus Christ.

We will journey through the joy and heartaches of our lives, becoming children of God along the way.

We will, in fact, die as children of God.

And then, I believe, we will wake up on the other side of this life, and continue becoming, and continue our journey into the very heart of God's love and light.

Alleluia.

Amen.