



September 16, 2012  
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*Did You Get the Word?*  
*Before Before*  
John 1:1-5

OK... you got me good! I don't know what is more impressive to me... that a church of 1500 people could keep my surprise 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary party a secret or that all of you are such liars! I have never been so lied to in all my life... impressive, but frightening.

Last Wednesday, we were trying to return from a pastoral staff retreat in time for what I thought was going to be a huge volunteer rally. I wanted to get back early to get ready, but unbeknownst to me the rest of the team had instructions to slow me down. I told them I wanted to leave by noon. But when I walked downstairs, expecting to see beds made and floors mopped, instead I found damp sheets spread all over the room, drying! What? That's what a dryer is for. But they are air drying the sheets. And then, when we finally do get to cleaning, they are moving one thing at a time, dawdling, losing things. I remember thinking, "What have I done? These are the slowest working people I have ever seen. They will never survive at Chapel Hill!"

Then we get home and my wife wants to go shopping at Marshalls. Cyndi hates shopping, but she takes me shopping for a shirt... and then looks at women's clothes... and then housewares. "Oh, look at this wonderful crepe pan. Oh, look at this wonderful batter gun." What!? She continues weaving her way through housewares, and then into the pet department. We don't even have pets, but Cyndi is oohing and ahing over the pet department. Are you kidding me!? And in the meantime, the clock is ticking away, and I am going to be late for the big rally... And I just made a huge thing with the newbies about never being late, because being late means you consider yourself more important than everyone else, blah, blah, blah.

Finally, I lead the team into a packed sanctuary. And here is what I thought: "This is the biggest gathering of volunteers in my 25 years of ministry... Hallelujah! My sermon series on "The Call" really worked! It is a new day." I was so pumped, I had my sermon on mentorship ready to go; I jumped up there and felt the buzz and got rolling on my message... and then the microphone starts going out. I nearly burst a vein. And what I later found out was that my own daughter Rachel (who had secretly flown over from Whitworth) was hiding in the cry room with all our out of town guests, and doing a play-by-play of my reaction. "Now watch this.

They are going to mess with his microphone. And when his mic goes bad, Dad is going to blow a cork." Then she started a drum roll. "Wait for it... wait for it... and there he blows!" And apparently, the cry room was full of grown men who were crying because they were laughing so hard... at your dear pastor's expense.

Seriously, that party was a moment of a lifetime, and I will never forget it. I was so flustered, however, that I failed to acknowledge the one person who is most responsible for my 25 years here... my wonderful wife, Cyndi. I could not have done this without her, and I think you know how fortunate you are to have her as the First Lady of this congregation. The fact that my wife and kids love this church that has loved them so well is the single most important human reason that I could stay in one place this long.

This celebration was not just for me; it was for all of us. It is great for us as a church to pause together once in a while and be reminded of how God is working in our lives and the way He is using us to bring light and life into this world. Aren't you glad you are part of it? Here's to 25 more! Our text this morning comes from the majestic prologue of John's gospel. [Read John 1:1-5]

You just listened to one of the most important passages in the New Testament. If you are going to have a few scriptures underlined and flagged in your memory banks, this should be one of them: John's great prologue. It is the most important Christological passage—Christological means the study of Christ—in the whole Bible.

Do you remember what we call the other three gospels collectively? The Synoptics. The Synoptics begin differently. Matthew starts with the birth of Jesus from Joseph's perspective. Luke starts with the birth of Jesus from Mary's perspective. Mark doesn't even mess with Christmas; he starts with the baptism of Jesus. But John doesn't start with Christmas, doesn't start with baptism... he starts in the mists of time at the real beginning before time even began. John starts before there was a before. By the end of the Synoptics, you begin to catch a glimpse of who Jesus really is. But John, in his first five verses says more explicitly about who the Son of God is than all the other gospels put together.

Most of you have probably heard this passage before. But this morning, I want to re-amaze you with the shocking nature of these few, majestic verses. [Hold up nesting doll.] Like one of these, as this passage unfolds, we get a deeper glimpse of the nature of God, and every phrase is a shocker! "In the beginning..." Let's stop right there. Why would this be shocking to first century readers? Or better, who would be shocked to read these words? Jews! Why? Because these are the opening words of Jewish scripture, aren't they? Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Those three words, "In the beginning..." are actually only one word in Hebrew; the word "Genesis," from which the book gets its name. Every Jew who read these three words from John's pen would sit up and

take notice. “Who dares to start a book with the same words that start our holiest Book?”

So, John immediately has the attention of the Jews. Now another layer deeper. “In the beginning was the Word...” Stop. Now whose attention is he grabbing? The Greeks! “Word,” in Greek is “Logos.” In Greek philosophy, the Logos was the organizing force that held creation together. It was like cosmic glue. Now who is John’s Logos? You probably already know. He will spill the beans in verse 17. But pretend you’ve never read this before. It is a surprise... an unveiling. When we read “Logos” we know that he means “Jesus.” [Whisper it with me.] But let’s go along with the story. Pretend we don’t know!

“In the beginning...”—he grabs the attention of the Jews. “...was the Logos...”—now he’s got the Greeks hooked. What’s next? Another layer deeper— “...and the Word was with God...” Wow! In Greek philosophy, the Logos was an impersonal force. Like gravity. Not a person! But clearly, John means something more. The Logos is a person who is in a relationship with God, but there’s something more we learn here, isn’t there? If “in the beginning” Logos was already there with God, what is John saying? The Logos is eternal. He exists outside of time. Before before. When time began, He already was... with God. Pretty amazing! But let’s dive deeper.

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God... and the Word was God!” Wait a second! It’s enough for you to claim that Logos lives in an eternal relationship with God, but now you are saying that He is God. The Logos—you know who—is divine! This is shocking to the Jews who are monotheists... shocking to the Greeks who believe Logos to be an impersonal cosmic force. Somehow, this Logos is distinct from, and yet is... God! What doctrine is John giving us a glimpse of? The Trinity! A God who is one God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit... John is rocking the first century world!

John restates his point for emphasis. He was with God in the beginning. Then, another layer: “Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.” Now what is John claiming for the Logos? He is the creator! Of a few things? Of everything! Another translation says, “Without Him not one single thing was made.” Everything that exists—that gorgeous sun that rose Friday, those waves that rolled in from the ocean we visited this week, the geysers we oohed and awed at this summer, the bison Cyndi thought was going to ram our car (you’ll hear more later), you and you and you—every single thing has been made by Logos.

This takes us back to the book of Genesis, doesn’t it? What happens in chapter 1 of Genesis? God creates. How does God create? He speaks. “Let there be...” How does one speak? With—wait for it—words! Ahhh.

Let's keep going. "In him was life and that life was the light of men". Note those two words: life and light—two of John's favorite words. Life, for John, means more than biological survival in this world. For John, life means thriving in relationship with our Creator, walking in the fullness of what we were destined to be for all of eternity. And Light means God's revelation, His truth. If we affirm that there is a God and that He has an opinion about how things ought to be, wouldn't it be worthwhile discovering what that opinion might be? So how can we know God's thoughts? Only if He reveals them to us... if He shines his light upon us. And the most brilliant, perfect light of God's revealing of Himself is seen where? In the Logos. In you know who! (Shhhh... Jesus!)

Now one last verse... and in this single verse, we discover the whole gospel. Ready? Buckle up: "The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it."

Right here, in 13 words, is the whole gospel. If we believe that Logos is you know who (shhhh), then what we are reading about here is the appearance of the eternal, divine one on earth... into our midst. What is darkness? It is sin and evil. For John, darkness represents the fallen-ness and corruption of this world, the evil enemy from whom we must be saved.

"The light shines in the darkness..." What part of the gospel story is that? Christmas! That's John's Christmas story. The eternal, divine, creator makes His appearance among his creation. He comes to His creatures who are living in darkness. The light-filled One comes a-shining. "...but the darkness has not overcome it." What is that talking about? What was the ultimate attempt to extinguish God's light? The crucifixion! Darkness tried to kill the light. And how did that work out for Darkness? Not so well! "...darkness has not overcome it." What is it? The Resurrection, the ultimate victory of light over darkness, of life over death. And notice, the darkness "...has not overcome it." Not past tense... continuous action. Right now, this very moment... the eternal, divine, life-giving, light-shining Logos is still conquering the darkness. It did not overcome the light. Darkness has not overcome it, and it never will overcome it, hallelujah!

Has ever more power been packed into fewer words? But why does it matter to us this morning? Right here, 1900 years after John wrote these words, what good are they other than to inspire us with majestic rhetoric?

Two things, I think. First of all, it tells us what to believe about "you know who". We live in a world that says, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe something." John says, "Rubbish; it absolutely matters that you believe the right things, and especially the right things about this person, Logos." Remember, at the end of his book, John says, "These things are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing, you might have life in his name." Well, these are the things that we are to believe. This is the truth about who Jesus is—not just a good guy, not just a sage, not just

a teacher or miracle worker or social worker. No, “you know who” is the Logos, the eternal, divine, creator, resuscitator, illuminator and darkness gladiator. This is God we are talking about, the creator of all things. If you believe Jesus to be anything less than that your God is too small. And he is not powerful enough to do what you desperately need done—which is to conquer your darkness.

I remember exploring Ape Caves down near Mt. St. Helens years ago. I had one measly flashlight and those caves are long and boulder-strewn. Hundreds of yards into the cave, all by ourselves, I dropped the flashlight and it went out. I have never known such darkness in my life. How in the world would we find our way back out? I felt around for the flashlight, found it, prayed and fiddled with it, and it came back on. Wowza!

But that is what is at stake here. We look around at our life and realize, “I am in darkness, and I have no way out!” Our new Assistant Pastor Larry gave his testimony to the Session Thursday night. It was very honest and very powerful. He told us of his condition until Jesus found him, and this was his word: depraved—utterly lost, in complete darkness. How many else would admit that was their condition before Logos found them? Every one of us! The gospel we proclaim—the only hope of the world—is that the light still shines in the darkness and that though the darkness does its damndest (and I mean that word literally), the darkness has not overcome it.

We are the people of Logos; we have been led from darkness into light. And our calling is to shine in the darkness with that inextinguishable light! You heard Linda’s story earlier. She was living in darkness. Not spiritual darkness; she knows the Lord. But the circumstances of her life were despairing and hopeless. But finally she asked for help. Logos heard her. And the people of Logos heard her. And once again, the light shone in the darkness. Don’t you want to be part of that? Don’t you want to be a reflection of the Light of Life that cannot be extinguished? Well, you can, and you are, and it all starts right here... before before. “In the beginning was the Word...”

Every year, hundreds go to Mexico to build homes for people who need help. Linda Brewer lives right here and is part of the Chapel Hill family. When we found out about terrible deterioration in her home—failed septic system, holes in the wall, mold and rot—we knew we had to do something for one of our own, right here.

Linda’s husband is Ed. He is the one in the wheelchair singing in the choir every Sunday. Six years ago following surgery, Ed suffered severe, life-threatening complications. They have spent through their insurance money and savings. Linda quit her job to be his caregiver, and during that time their home fell into a state of disrepair. Linda wants to bring Ed home, but the condition of their home won’t permit it.

That alone would be reason enough for us to help, but there's more you should know about Linda. For 18 years, she has gone down to the streets of Tacoma every Friday to feed the homeless. Anyone who has ever joined her knows, she doesn't just hand out food, she knows the people by name. She talks with them; she prays with them. Even though Linda has plenty of challenges of her own, she believes that God has called her to serve those who are less fortunate. And she has done that for 18 years... every Friday night!

Beloved... if ever there was someone who deserved to be blessed by this church, I believe it is Linda. Listen to more of her story. Linda has always been focused on the needs of others and never wanted to ask for help, but finally she was desperate and turned to her Chapel Hill LifeGroup. [Video]

With the extreme generosity of local businesses—you will hear more about them soon—thousands of dollars of supplies have been provided. And scores of Chapel Hill folks have begun to make the home safe and wheelchair accessible so that Linda can bring Ed home. It has been an incredible blessing. But there is more to do. Most importantly, we need to replace her septic field. That will cost thousands of dollars.

So, this morning, I am asking you to join Cyndi and me in making a sacrificial gift, beyond your tithe, to help Linda and Ed. Make your extra check out to Chapel Hill and put "Brewers" in the memo. Whatever you can give, I hope everyone will do something. Then after service, if you'd like to help with construction or cooking or cleaning or painting, look for the folks in the orange aprons. They will be happy to sign you up.

Doesn't this sound like the church being the church? Let's do this!

## Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
  1. Compare the start of John's gospel to the start of the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark and Luke). How is it different? What is the most important point that John is trying to make?
  2. What are the various claims that John makes about this mysterious "Word" fellow? (You discover His identity in verse 17, but for now, he is building up the suspense.) How are these claims received by the world today?
  3. How does a majestic passage like this, which peeks into eternity past, have anything to do with your life right here, right now? What difference do these verses mean to you?