

Perseverance in the Midst of Rejection and Betrayal

John 1:6-13

January 11, 2015

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We turn our attention to God's Word again. I want to read the passage that we read from this morning, from John chapter one, and emphasize other verses for this evening's meditation. God's Word, a reminder of Jesus Christ.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

God's Word.

So we've talked about Christmas not being over. Eleven days old it is, in fact. And during this time of the year, the Floras have a tradition that we try to keep. It puts us up on the roof, we nail lights on the outside of the house, and we string lights up on the inside of the house. We're trying to reflect in some small fashion this passage of Scripture, that light has come into the world. The light has come. That which enlightens everyone. The true light has come into the darkness of this world. The lights that we have, we're not going to have lines of gawkers coming to our house looking at the trillions of lights. We'll never be featured on the TLC show, "Crazy Christmas Lights," or anything like that. But we string enough lights so that when you go outside when it's dark like this, you can see everything. You can see everything on our driveway if you care to. You can see everything in the front yard—the garden, or what's left of it in the wintertime. And you can even see out to the edge of the cul-de-sac, the end of the road. Because just this little light can cut through a lot of darkness. Just a little light can cut through a lot of darkness.

And the true light, which gives light to everyone, has come into the world. Jesus describes himself as the light that shines forth in the darkness. And we're very much aware that we live in a dark, dark world. We don't like to think about it. I don't like to think about it. I don't like to open up the news feed on our computer and see a grandmother decapitated by her own grandchild. I don't like to hear about terrorist organizations that are developed and well-maintained and exerting their terror activity on nations all around the world. Widespread corruption in federal, local, state, and other forms of government. Civil unrest. Racial tension. Malicious neighbors. Malicious family members. We know how dark the world is.

If we just take time to reflect, you could actually get quite depressed. In fact, I think that the darkness is constantly pressing against us to drag us down. We need reminders like this, and reminders like that table, to know that the true light has come into this world. True light has broken through the darkness. That darkness is just the darkness outside of ourselves. Not to mention the darkness lurking

within each of us if left unchecked by His light. The darkness of bitterness, rage, lust, self-centeredness, gossip, covetousness, unfaithfulness, deception. You can fill in your own list. That's just my list.

Jesus came bringing light and life and—this is the point I want to make tonight—he did so amongst abject rejection and betrayal. He came to a world that received him not. He came to his own people, and his own people rejected him. I'm not sure what your experience is with rejection and betrayal. For some of you, I imagine, it's a fairly extensive experience. You have stories of horrible treatment by your fellow humans. I've heard some of them, and they are tragic and sad. I only have, I think, mild experience with rejection and betrayal if I make a comparison among those I've heard. In fact, if I evaluate honestly, even those events that I characterize as rejection and betrayal are nothing compared to what is described by what our Lord experienced. When he came on this rescue mission that we celebrate at Christmas, he came to prophesied, well-known, understood—before he left the glory of heaven, he knew there would be rejection. He knew there would be betrayal. It didn't take him by surprise. The prophet Isaiah reflects this. He was despised and rejected by men. He had no form or stately beauty that we would be drawn to him. He was stricken, smitten, and afflicted. He knew all that, and he still came.

I don't know what you do when there's even a perceived rejection that I have. If I even perceive that I'm being rejected by someone, I don't draw close to them. In fact, quite the opposite. I usually make myself very distant from them. I don't want the hurt. I don't want that pain of what that means. But the purpose and the stalwart, firm plan of God was so in Christ, that he moved toward the rejection. His perseverance in the midst of rejection and betrayal is what we want to see and savor again.

Here's John's gospel. He records for us in verse five that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness—my translation says—has not overcome it. But many translations, and in fact it's an appropriate translation to read that darkness has not apprehended or taken hold of that light. It's the same word that's used in other passages of the Scriptures that refer to seizing hold of someone. So light has come into the world, but the darkness has not apprehended or received it. Verse ten: "Though the world was made through him, the world did not know him." Rejection. And verse eleven: "He came to his own people, and his own people received him not." I wonder why John repeats that? Here's the prologue of John's gospel. He's going to lay out the life and work of Jesus Christ, and in the first eighteen verses he's giving us the sense that the one he's going to talk about is Almighty God in the flesh. And in three of those verses, what he does is he talks about the fact that Almighty God the Creator would come to his creation and his creation would reject him. He still came. In fact, he willingly came. He lovingly came. He purposefully came to us.

Our natural inclination, we saw that this morning—or at least we see it in our New Year's resolutions—you don't make resolutions to do the bad stuff. They come natural. Our natural inclination is to reject God. It's to find ourselves distant from God. We sing that beloved hymn: "Prone to wander. Prone to leave the God I love." It doesn't make sense, and yet that's our natural state. And so light has come to dispel our darkness. John three, Jesus is speaking with Nicodemus, and in verse nineteen it tells us that this is the condemnation. Light has come into the world, but men love the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil. That's us. It's a description of us. And if I could be so bold, it's a description of you, and me, so that we feel the weight of what that supper represents tonight.

The supper represents people who would reject the God that gave himself for us. It's the supper that reflects the fact that he would have his body given in your place, and he would shed his blood so that your sins and my sins—all those nasty, rotten, despicable things that our churning up in our heart—they would be covered. They wouldn't stand against our account. That's what this table represents. He willingly, knowingly came to a world that did not love him and a people that did not receive him, and he moved towards his enemies so that we might be called children, sons and daughters, beloved, the bride of Christ.

And then, as he works in us, he works in us in such a way that just like this supper tonight and the supper that we had last month and the supper that we'll have in a couple weeks, and all the times that the gospel is preached—what he's doing is he's producing in his people from grace to grace and from glory to glory, people who reflect him. More than we did yesterday, but not as much as we will tomorrow. That's the goal. That's the hope. We're growing in grace. That's why we come each month. That's why we have one in seven where we gather as a people. That's why when we scatter and disperse, we don't just forget about God all week. We go to fellowship groups, we have Bible studies in our homes, and we open up the Scripture late at night or early in the morning or at lunch or somewhere—and we reflect on him, because that's how we grow in grace. We know that.

So, he was despised. He was rejected so that we might be accepted. So that we might be beloved. That's the Christmas exchange. We talk about the exchange of gifts—that's the greatest exchange that's ever taken place. The Son of Man given for us. And so he came to a world that would reject him, and then on the night on which he was betrayed by one of the twelve, he broke bread, and he held it up as a sign. He identified it—“This bread, my beloved disciples, this bread is my body. It's going to be laid down in your place.” And then after supper, he took the cup and he held that up as a sign for them. He said, “This cup that we drink of, it's the cup of the new covenant, and it's in my blood. Every time you eat this, and every time you drink this, you do so in remembrance of me.”

The passage describes for us this other person. It's not the Word, it's a man named John who was sent from God. We know that to be John the Baptist. He was a cousin of Jesus of Nazareth. He was sent from God. He came as witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through his testimony. And then John makes it very clear—I love it—“he was not the light.” John the Baptist was not the light, but he came to bear witness about the light. The true light. The true light which enlightens everyone was coming into the world. When Paul the apostle wrote to the church in Corinth, and he described the night in which Jesus was betrayed, and when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, Paul said, “As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.” So we've been given the same kind of role that John the Baptist had.

Now, we're not going to be as great as John the Baptist, because he's been described in Scriptures as the great prophet. But when we partake of this meal, by faith, and we submit ourselves to the authority of the church, and we ask for our lives and our doctrine to be watched over closely, and we submit ourselves to be corrected if necessary—what we do is we show forth the Lord's death for sinners, and the glorious Lord's life in our place. That's what church is all about, essentially. Making other disciples of Christ. Someone cared enough about us to share that good news with us, to risk hurting our feelings—“Don't you know you're a black-hearted sinner and you're going to hell if you don't have Christ covering your sins?” Maybe they didn't say it that quickly or that bluntly, but that's the message of this Scripture, right? That's half the message. The other half is that the answer is found in Christ. The answer is found in the God who was in the beginning, and who was God, and who took on flesh and blood so that he might shed that blood and cover our sins.

I was taking the trash out on New Year's evening, in the middle of the night—I think it was after midnight. We had already unplugged our Christmas lights. We had a whole lot of trash, and I knew that the guys were coming the next day because it was a holiday and you know how that works in Columbia region. I was dragging all the bags out to the curb—all of our Christmas trash, all of our New Year's trash, all of the stuff we'd accumulated—and I was struck by something as I looked around. I could see everything. And it was like midnight-thirty. And I looked up, and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. There was this almost full but not quite big white thing just shining forth. It was illuminating the whole yard. If we had a herd of deer out there, I could have seen them and counted their horns.

And then it hit me. That's not really the true light. That's just a reflection of the light. That's what John was. That's what we are. We're not the true light; we're simply a reflection of the light. That moon was shining so brightly, but it wasn't emanating light that was its own original light. It was merely a

reflection. We've heard this analogy dozens of times, but it never gets old. Jesus came to be our light, to dispel our darkness. And then to have that light emanate from us—or to shine, or to reflect his light to others.

So, as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of Almighty God who took on flesh on behalf of sinners. And I am one of them. That's our proclamation. That's how we reflect that light. And then we live according to the light. That's what John's first letter's all about, but we're not going to preach that tonight. So as we come to the table, I want us to see him who was stricken, smitten, and afflicted. I want us to see the one who was dying on a tree for you and for me. I want us to see the Christ, by man rejected, the long-awaited prophet in the lineage of David, completely fulfilling every prophesy ever spoken about him. He was the Word in the beginning with God, and he was God, and he became flesh. Rejected by his own. Betrayed and denied by those closest to him. And the deepest stroke that pierced him was the stroke that justice gave. Because to be rejected by his own people, I'm sure, was a painful thing. To be betrayed by one of his disciples was horrific. But to be forsaken by his Father—that one who he had had face to face fellowship from all eternity with—that was... there is no word. But he was forsaken so that we might be forgiven. He was rejected so that we might be accepted.

So, I want to invite Julie and Sophia and Christopher up to lead us again. We're going to sing that hymn—stricken, smitten, and afflicted. And then let's come to the table with a picture of Christ.