

The Big Picture

Dr. Hmingi Browne



John 1:1-18

Today we are looking at the Big Picture of God's action. The Gospel According to John, Chapter 1, stretches our vision from before the beginning of time - to the new creation at the end of time. It reaches from matters beyond space and form - to the most specific form of a baby born to a young woman in Bethlehem.

It shows us the actions of God, and God as the Word incarnate in Jesus, redeeming us and claiming us as his own children. John chapter 1 tells the great story of what God was doing from creation through every moment of human history. It takes us from heaven down into the world, into the individual story of every person including you and me.

We Christians, through the ages have loved this poetic passage and we call it "The Prologue."

The Prologue prepares us for the good news that transforms and undergirds our lives. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...." This passage focuses on the Big Picture of God coming to us in Jesus as the Word.

Part of the power of the poem is that it uses repeated words to form a pattern we can both hear and see. The pattern of the poetry shows God's love moving down in Jesus to be God's Word of Love to us.

Besides being an introduction, this morning's passage is like the "Hallelujah Chorus" in Handel's *Messiah*. Where I come from the "Hallelujah Chorus" is not saved for performances at Christmas and Easter. It is sung at every important religious event.

It is sung at church anniversaries, funerals, weddings, ordinations, the hosting of important visitors. Just as the "Hallelujah Chorus" is the most beautiful expression of praise in the *Messiah*, the words of the Prologue are the poetic high point of the Gospel According to John.

The Prologue of the Gospel tells the big picture of God's love for us. Most importantly, it prepares us for the story of God sending Jesus as the Word incarnate to give us salvation and make us children of God. The Prologue celebrates Jesus as the Word connecting God to us and us to God.

For the Gospel writer, John, Prologue is a perfect scripture for this morning's worship on the Fourth Sunday of Advent. We are set to go for God's last step into the human story... but we are not quite there yet this morning! It is a great way to finish our Advent preparation. So that we can celebrate Jesus' birth on Christmas Eve. This evening!

“Every time someone is baptized, we are reminded of our own baptism in which God claims us.”

You are invited to come back for the celebration of Jesus' birth at - either at 5, 7, 9 or 11 pm - come to one or two or all of them - Pastor Steve and I will be here the whole time. Please come back to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

A few weeks ago, Will and I went to see the movie, *Wonder*. It is a movie about a boy, named Auggie, born with severe facial malformation. In the story, the growing child and the parents and sister fight for him to be accepted. It is not an easy story but it is a triumphant story.

Part of what makes it a great story is that we come to see the particulars in Auggie's life connect with the Big Picture story of good in the universe of life. Auggie's family and friends, and eventually his whole school, move beyond mere acceptance to celebrate the wonder that he is.

Auggie becomes a presence that points to something far greater than himself. An ordinary boy pointing to the extra-ordinary. Today I want us to think of what is here with

us in this sanctuary. I want us to notice the things that have become ordinary to us but are actually extra-ordinary. They remind us of God and God's Big Picture story of God's creative, sustaining and redeeming love for us.

By the way, did I remember to tell you this morning's sermon is more or less la glorified children's sermon. So please be ready to participate.

SYMBOLS

This candle is here every Sunday and shows us light - it symbolizes God's light for us. It is, therefore, a visual Word of God for us.

The Bible

What does this book tell us? Yes, it is the Word of God....This is the scriptural Word of God for us.

Cup & Plate

What are these and what do they remind us? Jesus said "Every time you do this, do this in remembrance of me." In communion we receive grace, forgiveness, and salvation from

God. The cup and plate are the sacramental Word of God to us.

Communion Table

Why is the communion table here on the chancel? The Communion table reminds of Jesus and his hospitality. It reminds us that each of us has a place at God's table as God's invited guest. This is the hospitable Word of God.

Baptismal Font

This Baptismal Font reminds us that we are baptized into God's household. We are marked by his love forever. Every time someone is baptized, we are reminded of our own baptism in which God claims us. We have two baptisms today - Finley Claire Johnson, 9 am and Lily Bidwell McKay, 11 am. This Baptismal Font is a sacramental Word of God.

Cross

The cross reminds us of the cost of salvation. The cross is a symbolic Word of God.

Pulpit

The pulpit provides the setting for the Sermon, the Word of God preached. The sermon preached from the pulpit is the spoken Word of God.

People

Who are these people? This is a picture of you – worshipers here. Mother Teresa said peoples' faces bear the image of Jesus. I agree with her. Don't you?

In the movie *Wonder*, Auggie hides his face inside a space helmet. His father finally steals and discards the helmet. When Auggie asks him “why,” he says, “You were wearing that helmet all the time. And the real, real, real truth is: I missed seeing your face, Auggie. I know you don't always love it, but you have to understand ... I love it. I love my son's face. I love this face of yours, Auggie, completely and passionately. And it kind of broke my heart that you were always covering it up.” During Advent, we add other special things pointing to Jesus' birth. We add the color purple.

Purple

So what is the significance of purple? Purple is the color of royalty and Jesus is our royalty.

Wreath

What does a green wreath remind us? The green wreath reminds us that God's love lasts forever and ever. It never ends.

Advent Wreath

How does the Advent Wreath help us? It marks the progress of our Advent preparation. Each candle conveys a theme: 1) Jesus is our hope 2) Jesus is our prince of peace 3) Jesus gives us joy, and today 4) we light the candle of love. Jesus brings God's love to us.

Manger

Why is the manger scene important to us? It reminds us of the humble birth of Jesus

All of these symbols – including our faces – are not ‘Advent Season specials.’ They are not just here until the last shopping day before Christmas (which, not to panic you, is today!). All of these things seem ordinary because they are here every Sunday or every Advent. And, we are here every Sunday.

The Organ

But, really, these things, including our faces - are extraordinary. Interwoven with the beauty of the music and liturgy, these symbols point us back every Sunday to the Big Picture of God's love given in Jesus for us. They point us to the Word we hear in the Prologue of the Gospel According to John.

Now! Our Advent preparation is done. We are ready for the Christmas Eve celebration! Give thanks to God for, as John said, “From God's fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” Now, having experience the whole Big Picture, as I mentioned earlier, you are invited to come back to celebrate Christmas at 5, 7, 9 or 11 pm. Thanks be to God for letting us be part of the Big Picture. Amen.



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