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 First Sunday of Lent

Jesus The Light and Life
John 1:1-18

*In the beginning was the **Word**, and the **Word** was with **God**, and the **Word** was **God**.² He was in the beginning with **God**.³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being⁴ in him was life,^[a] and the life was the light of all people.⁵ The **light shines in the darkness**, and the darkness did not overtake it.*

*⁶ There was a man sent from **God** whose name was **John**.⁷ He came as a witness to **testify to the light**, so that all might believe through him.⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.⁹ **The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.**^[b]*

[He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him.¹¹ He came to what was his own,^[c] and his own people did not accept him.¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of **God**,¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of **God**].

*¹⁴ **And the Word became flesh and lived among us**, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,^[d] full of grace and truth.¹⁵ (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.' ")¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, **grace upon grace.**^[e] ¹⁷ The law indeed was given through **Moses**; grace and truth came through **Jesus Christ**.¹⁸ No one has ever seen **God**. **It is the only Son, himself **God**, who^[f] is close to the **Father's heart**,^[g] who has made him known.***

This summer we're going with my spiritual director,
 and 14 other pastors and spouses on a **pilgrimage to Scotland**.
 We'll spend a week on the **Isle of Iona**,
 the cradle of Celtic Christianity,
 and the monastic community founded by Columba in the year 563.

***Iona is a tiny island in the Inner Hebrides,
 off the Northwest coast of Scotland.***

It's also where an incredible piece of religious history,
 the **Book of Kells** was created by monks around the year 800. \

The Book of Kells is a *famous illuminated manuscript of the Gospels*. After being created on Iona it was taken to Ireland to the Columban monastery at Kells, before it was stolen, buried, then retrieved and finally put on display at *Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland* in the late 1600s.

Iona was the birthplace of the book, and the home of a *monastic community* dedicated to preserving the Word of God-- both the *person of Jesus Christ, and the written Word*. Many of the early monks had all 150 Psalms committed to memory, and would often meditate on the shore while reciting them. They lived for and on God's Word.

The Iona abbey was destroyed by Vikings multiple times, but was eventually restored, and today houses a worshipping ecumenical community. In July, we will worship everyday at the abbey, and study the history of not only Iona, but also the Celtic saints who came from Ireland to Scotland to preserve the faith for centuries to come.

Our trip is being led by a professor and author named Tracy Balzer, who has written books like *Thin Places*, about the Celtic Christian tradition. We are reading all of her books and others, like the *Iona Prayerbook*, and *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, before we travel in July.

One thing that strikes me about this spiritual pilgrimage is its emphasis on God's Word— both the person of Jesus, and the Word of God in scripture.

Which brings us to John 1—'In the beginning was the Word' This echo of Genesis and the Creation story is no accident. John wants us to know that Jesus is God, from the very beginning. And just as *God SPOKE creation* into being, So God sent us Jesus, the Word, to bring us new creation—new and eternal life.

At the end of Gospel, in John 20:31, we learn the purpose of John's Gospel:

to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

John wants us as Christ followers, to know this truth:

Jesus, the Word, is our Life and Light.

And he wants us to do something---

***to live by the Word Jesus Christ,
and the Word in Scripture.***

In order to find true light and life.

Today, on this first Sunday of Lent—we start a study of the Gospel of John.

On Ash Wednesday you heard Pastor Karen introduce us to Lent,

And the powerful practice of receiving ashes.

Lent reminds us of our need for confession,

of our own mortality,

of the power of God to use our brokenness for good.

We heard the words ‘remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return’

and we remember that Lent is about dying to ourselves,

so that we might live in Jesus Christ.

Lent is the 40 days before Holy Week (not including Sundays),

And it is a time of prayer, fasting, repentance, spiritual disciplines,

Like study and worship.

It is the perfect season to recommit ourselves

to following Jesus Christ alone.

But, I wonder what Lent means to you?

And what you plan to do in this season?

Lent is a 40-day observance,

because 40 is the number for testing in Scripture,

like the 40 day flood and the 40 years the Israelites wandered in the desert.

But it also calls to mind the 40 days that Jesus was tested in the desert,

Fasting without food or water,

and the devil tempted him to turn stones to bread,

to throw himself off a cliff,

and to bow down and worship Satan.

And what did Jesus do?

He didn't give in.

Instead, he *relied upon God's Word* to sustain him.

He told Satan that *man does not live by bread alone but by every Word from the mouth of God.*

When *Satan quoted Psalm 91* as a reason for him to throw himself off a cliff, Jesus responded by quoting scriptures about *not testing God.*

And when Satan tempted him to receive power by worshiping him—

Jesus quoted the scripture which says that *we are to worship God alone.*

It might seem like Satan can quote scripture just as well as Jesus.

But is that true?

For Jesus the Word of God was life and light,

not so for the devil.

The devil was using it for evil and temptation.

But the *heart of Jesus was rooted in the Word of God.*

Romans 10:9 says: *if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*

Notice what Paul says there.

He is saying that our *lips and heart should MATCH.*

When Satan quotes scripture, it is *just his lips* that speak the words.

But for Jesus, *his heart believes what his lips are saying!*

So I wonder, do OUR lips and hearts match?

Does what we say from God's Word

match what we believe in our hearts?

That's a great question to think about during Lent, isn't it?

Is what we SAY matched by what we BELIEVE?

And what about what we SAY, vs. what we DO?

Do ALL 3 match—*our lips, hearts, and actions?*

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to have those line up, aren't we?

So, how does that work in your life?

As we move through Lent,

We'll be moving through the Gospel of John.

One thing we learn is that the John is unique among the 4 Gospels.
 Matthew, Mark, and Luke are known as the **SYNOPTIC** gospels—
 a Greek word that means ‘together’,
 because they contain much of the same material—
 from an ancient source many refer to as Q—
 the original material for the stories of those three Gospels.

But John was written last, likely in the last twenty years of the 1st century,
 Likely after all the other disciples were martyred.
 It was written either by John the brother of James, ‘the beloved disciple’,
 or by someone using his life and witness.

It is more of a SPIRITUAL and theological commentary than a biography.
 It is full of **metaphors and images** that are unique to this Gospel.
 The kingdom of God or heaven does not play a prominent role,
 Instead, there is an **emphasis on the person of Jesus,**
and believing and living in him.

The first 18 verses of the Gospel prologue
may have been an early Christian hymn.
 And when Jesus is referred to as the **Word**—
 that Greek word **LOGOS** means more than a spoken or written word,
 it’s where we get the term *logic* from.

Logos is deeper than words, it means wisdom or revelation.
 And Jesus is certainly the revelation of God’s power, and God’s love.
 Jesus is **the light and life** that brings salvation.

Jesus is also the Incarnation—
that term that describes John 1:14:
And the word became flesh and dwelt among us....
 Jesus is the one **who has made God known, as we heard in verse 18.**

All throughout the Gospel of John,
we see descriptions of darkness and light.
 For John, darkness is spiritual blindness, evil, despair, or being lost.
 And light is about seeing God, goodness, hope, and being found.

So what does this mean FOR US?
 What if we are **called to shine the light of Christ?**

What if we are called to ***bring light into the darkness of our world?***
Because that light leads to true life?

That word LIFE is used 47 times in the Gospel of John.

And it's not just referring to eternal life in heaven—
Jesus is pointing to a new life that begins right now.

When Jesus talks to Nicodemus in John Chapter 3,
about being born from above, that is about new life, right now.

When Jesus offers the ***woman at the well*** living water,
that is about finding real life, right now.

When Jesus heals the ***man born blind*,**
that is about finding life, right now.

***The whole Gospel begins by saying that the life
was the light that shines in the darkness***

John 1:3 says: *What has come into being⁴ in him was life and the life was the light
of all people.⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome
it.*

What does this LIGHT AND LIFE look like in your life, today?

Where do you ***SEE it?***

Where do you ***NEED it?***

Russell D. Moore once wrote in Christianity Today:

For too long, we've called unbelievers to 'invite Jesus into your life'.

Jesus doesn't want to be in your life.

Your life's a wreck.

Jesus calls you into HIS life..."

*Russell D. Moore, "A Purpose-Driven Cosmos: Why Jesus Doesn't Promise Us an Afterlife", Christianity
Today 56 (Feb 2012), pg. 33; quoted in Hamilton, Adam. John: The Gospel of Light and Life.
Abingdon:2015, pg. 22.*

Isn't that so true?

Jesus doesn't want to be in your life—***he calls you into HIS life.***

Isn't that what we really need?

To live in Jesus Christ?

To find true life and light through Jesus himself? Not anything or anyone else?

So, how can YOU live in Christ?

One way I see is through learning about Jesus.
I love learning—I loved college, and seminary.
And look forward to this learning on pilgrimage in July.

But not everyone loves learning.

If not, what DO you love?

Don't we all love knowing something?
Especially something unique? Or life-changing?

I wonder if you love God-sightings? Or God-winks?

Do you enjoy hearing things about God, in prayer or study?
What about understanding God's plan for your life?

Don't we all have a hunger for something bigger than ourselves?

Doesn't that hunger come from God?
I believe that hunger is fulfilled by Jesus,
by knowing, believing, and living in Jesus Christ.

Tracy Balzer, in her book *Thin Places*, talks about the love of learning, and growing—as being from God.

In **Matthew 22:37**: Jesus says: '*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*'

At first this seems to be quoting the Shema—the ancient **Jewish prayer from Deuteronomy 6:5**.

But Jesus ADDED something to it.

To love God with our MINDS.

And in the ancient world, the MIND was not just about thinking—it was the seat of being, knowing, and being known.

So, how do you use YOUR MIND to follow Christ?

This week we'll start our study of the Gospel of John.
You can pick up a study guide in the Narthex or foyer table.
I hope you'll join us each Wednesday for 5 weeks, from 6-7:15pm.

Friends, hear the ***Good News of the Gospel today:***

Our Savior is the Word, that brings us Light and Life.

And for that, all God's people can say together, Amen.