

FIRST LESSON: Ecclesiastes 3:1-13
SECOND LESSON: John 1:1-18
December 29, 2024

“At the Right Time”
Sermon © Lisa C. Farrell

At the right time the Word became flesh and dwelled among us. How do we know that it was the right time? Ecclesiastes says, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal.” God determined in God’s perfect timing when it was time for God’s son to come among us, to share fully in our humanity, so that we might share in the divine life of heaven. Even though no time is perfect, perhaps this was the time to send Jesus into the world because the world finally had a concept that would remotely fit—the Logos. We are told of Jesus, “He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”

Logos is the word that we have translated “word.” That is a very vague translation that does not begin to capture what logos means. I have no idea who came up with “word” because I was always very confused as to how a person could be a word. But how someone could be the logos is a different matter.

Simply put, the logos is the principle of divine reason and order built into the universe. A Greek philosopher came up with the idea six centuries before Christ. Just like humans have a reasoning power, the cosmos has an underlying logic. It’s organized. Everything fits together down to the tiniest detail. The Logos is the DNA of the universe. Matter isn’t just randomly and chaotically thrown everywhere. Later philosophers developed the concept further. The logos was the spiritual principle permeating reality. A first century Jewish philosopher named Philo went so far as to teach that the logos was the intermediary between God and the cosmos, both involved in creation and in helping human beings comprehend God. For the author of John’s gospel to say that Jesus is the logos is the fulfillment of all of these ideas. It’s a theological statement of incredible depth and audacity. John was saying that a man, a human being, a condemned criminal, was a pre-existent part of God. And this Jesus who was divine, became flesh and dwelt among us.

John affirms everything that philosophers believed to be true of the logos to be true of Jesus. Jesus was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all humankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. According to John, “the Logos

was with God, and the Logos was God.” And here I want to stop for a moment for another subtle but important clarification. Our English translation makes it look as if Jesus and God the Father are the same thing. But a better translation of the Greek grammar might be, “the Logos was divine.” The structure of the Greek indicates that Jesus shares the **same nature** as God the Father, which makes more sense than saying Jesus = God the Father.

John’s gospel also makes a statement by using the words, “In the beginning.” For Jews, books of the bible were identified by their first words. Genesis means, “In the beginning.” This is a new beginning. And John’s gospel also takes great pains to explain that John the Baptist was not the light, but only a witness to the light, quoting him as saying, “This is the one I spoke about when I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’” Jesus surpassed John because Jesus pre-existed John. John the Baptist continued to have a strong following long after his death, which may be the reason the author was so explicit.

Despite the fact that the world was made through Jesus, the world did not recognize him. He came to his own people, and they did not receive him. **This is staggering.** The cosmos in all its pre-fallen perfection was made through the pre-incarnate Jesus, the divine principle of order and creative beauty, but it had fallen so far from that perfection that it did not even recognize him. And it’s not that God had not already been speaking through the law and the prophets. Integrity, truth, grace, mercy and justice should have resonated, but they did not. Instead, greed, pride, arrogance and violence held sway. But some do receive Jesus, and to those who recognize him for who he truly is, he gives the right to become children of God.

How could the infinite God take on human limitations and physical form? As shocking as the idea is to us, it was even more shocking then, because people in the 1st century were beginning to believe that the physical world itself was evil. Some claimed to have hidden and superior knowledge, and this knowledge included the idea that physical desires of any kind were to be overcome. Those who the author of John contended with were extreme and would not acknowledge that Jesus was human at all. It was, they alleged, impossible because all matter was evil. They taught that Jesus was pure spirit and only appeared to be human. And so hidden in this passage is another word that does not hit us in the same way it did the original audience because we are far removed and reading a translation. The word was deliberately shocking and crude. It is *sarx*, or flesh. Jesus became **flesh** and blood like us. Jesus took on our physical nature with all its problems in order to save us from ourselves. “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

We all know about moral laws, and we all know that we inevitably break at least some of them. The law in itself is not bad. God gave the law through Moses to show how we should live. But what we see in Christ is not just a lawgiver, but a giver of mercy and grace. We see the nature of God in human form. Law by itself can kill. But grace is a profound concept that transcends law. It is lovingkindness, mercy and faithfulness.

We are short on grace in our society. We judge people according to things they did 20 years ago. We jump on every misstatement. We shine a spotlight on every flaw, and we rarely give second chances. Heaven help the person who runs for public office! But grace is the complete opposite of this. Grace forgives. Grace is compassionate. Grace appreciates the struggles another person may be experiencing. Grace is not quick to judge. Grace allows past failures to fall away into oblivion in order for new life and growth to happen. Grace does not judge us on the basis of our worst days and our worst acts, and in the incarnate Jesus we find grace.

Jesus is also the embodiment of truth, and truth brings freedom. To live in truth is to live in reality. We are in dangerous times right now. Conspiracy theories still abound everywhere. People believe things that are absolutely completely false, and when lies take hold, they reap destruction. God brings us into truth and clarity. We never need to be afraid of the truth. Truth delivers us from cult like thinking and political spin. Facts are actually facts. There is such a thing as objective reality.

John's gospel is a radical gospel. It proclaims truly unimaginable things. We find our faith challenged and stretched. If we're honest we admit that it is easier for us to think of Jesus as either purely God and to pray to him that way, or as completely human and look to him as a role model. Holding both together is very hard! But this truth is at the very center of our faith. It is what we celebrate at Christmas. The infinite God of the universe took on our incredibly limited nature in order to rescue us. The healing of broken human nature is only possible because God assumed it. We hear about Jesus dying for our sin, but salvation is more than an external act. Redeeming humanity is only made possible because the one who designed it—the DNA of the universe—came into it to fix it. He lived in our brokenness, and did not break.

Do we still struggle with sin in this world? Yes. But we have Christ to help us overcome. Our faith in the present is the beginning of a full restoration to come. At the right time Jesus came, and at the right time he will come again. Amen.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

- 3** There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:
- 2** a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
- 3** a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
- 4** a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
- 5** a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
- 6** a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
- 7** a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,

8 a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.
9 What do workers gain from their toil? **10** I have seen the burden God has laid
on the human race. **11** He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has
also set eternity in the human heart; yet^[a] no one can fathom what God has
done from beginning to end. **12** I know that there is nothing better for people
than to be happy and to do good while they live. **13** That each of them may eat
and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God.

John 1:1-18

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word
was God. **2** He was with God in the beginning. **3** Through him all things were
made; without him nothing was made that has been made. **4** In him was
life, and that life was the light of all mankind. **5** The light shines in the
darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. **7** He came as a
witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might
believe. **8** He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.
9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.
10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world
did not recognize him. **11** He came to that which was his own, but his own did
not receive him. **12** Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his
name, he gave the right to become children of God— **13** children born not of
natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.
14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his
glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of
grace and truth.
15 (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke
about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was
before me.'") **16** Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace
already given. **17** For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came
through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son,
who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made
him known.