

John's Story

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[0 : 00] Father, as we prepare to reflect upon your word and to be fed by your word, Father, we know that we ultimately have come here this morning to be fed by you. You have no needs.

We are one unending, constant, unending need. And so, Father, we know you do not need our praise. You love our praise, but you do not need it. But we come, Father, to receive from you, to receive grace from you through your word, through the Holy Communion, through the prayers, through the songs, through the music, through the presence of Jesus in our midst.

We desire, Father, to receive from you. So we ask that your Holy Spirit would grant us hearts that are deeply receptive to all that you desire to give us and do in our lives this morning.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. So please be seated. Those of you, if you were here at the beginning, this is the most unusual church service that we do in the whole year.

It's the most informal church service. Our numbers range anything from about 19 or 20 people to about 50. People are just in a bit of a different mood. I'm not even wearing a clergy shirt.

[1 : 13] And our sermon is a bit different, and it's especially different. I usually intersperse my sermon with some videos. And this first video we're going to show is a longer video. It's 12 minutes long. Usually they're short ones, but we don't have as many kids at this service.

But it fits in very powerfully with the John text that we're going to look at in our theme of the difference between Christian Christmas and Canadian or secular Christmas.

So please enjoy this video, and then I'll continue on with the sermon topic. Thank you. Thank you. I think it's a very, very powerful line.

Before I saw this video, I hadn't realized it was 50 years ago that that iconic picture was first shown. I was 12 years old when that happened. You can figure out my age from that.

And I remember it very clearly, actually. It was quite a momentous thing for those of us who are old enough to remember it. But I thought the line for the astronaut, that it's far more important and remarkable that God walked on earth than that a man walked on the moon, it's a very powerful line.

[2 : 21] If you turn your Bibles to John chapter 1, that is the message. In a sense, what that is doing is just reflecting what the Bible teaches. And because John wants to communicate that as clearly as he can.

Each of Matthew and in many ways, each of the gospel writers communicates the divinity of Jesus. But John does it in a very, very powerful and ingenious way.

If you listen to it like this, In the beginning was the Word, John chapter 1, verse 1. 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 anything made that was made. In him was life, and the light, and the life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Let's sort of pause here for a second. You know, just every Christmas, I've been ordained.

[3 : 22] I got ordained in 1985, and so I've now, I think this is, if I'm counting right, this is my 34th Christmas as a pastor. So every year I have to reflect on these texts.

And I don't know if I could, I wish I could say that every year I learn something new about them, but I often do. And this year, something really struck me about it. It's just, like, several things about it. Because I've often puzzled around the word, word. Like, why did he use something like that? And this year, two things struck me about it. The first thing, I've continued to think about my trip to Angola a year and a half ago.

And as some of you know, I had the great privilege of being able, invited to go to a people group that had just recently heard the gospel. A missionary organization had figured out a way to connect with a semi-nomadic tribe on the Kalahari Desert.

And so I was there to speak to missionaries, and I had an opportunity to preach to this group. And I had to preach with two translators, because some of the people spoke Portuguese, and others just spoke the nomadic language.

[4 : 33] So I would say a few words, and then it would be said in Portuguese, and then it would be said in the language of the semi-nomadic tribe. And I think I've shared with you, I caused, there'd be sometimes I'd say something which is very simple, and there'd be this long argument between people as to what the best way was to try to translate that word into the local language.

One of them was when I tried to describe to them, I was just trying to relate to them at the beginning, and I said I came from a place that had over three meters of snow last winter, because that's how much snow we get.

They had this long, long, long talk. It took almost five minutes, because there was no word in their language for snow. So I ended up translating it that I came from where there were three meters of ice every winter, which just left them all shaking their head, wondering how you could have three meters of ice land on you and live.

But we just kept on going. But, you know, but just something simple like that, if you think about it, the challenge of the missionary. If you think about the challenge of the missionary, how do you communicate the gospel, Jesus, to a tribe in, a semi-nomadic tribe in the Kalahari?

How do you translate it to the Inuit? How can you, it's really interesting. I was in Kenya a couple of years ago, and I shared with the Kenyans that there was an Eskimo with me.

[6 : 02] He wasn't with me right then, but he was, I was staying with him. And they were all unbelievably fascinated that there was an Eskimo in Kenya. And I said to, I said to my friend, I said, probably if you lined up and said I'm a real Eskimo, there'd be a whole pile of people who'd want to line up and take your picture with them, just because it would be so, it was so unusual to them.

But anyway, how do you translate the gospel to the Inuit? How do you translate the gospel to, I mean, to a sub, you know, a tribe from the Kalahari?

Or to go back, you know, my ancestors, I'm Irish. So, you know, 17, 1800 years ago, my ancestors stripped themselves naked, painted themselves blue, and taunted the Romans.

How do you communicate the gospel to people who would think that the way to fight the Romans is to take all your clothes off and paint yourself blue and yell at them? I mean, how do you communicate the gospel to all of that?

And if you think about it, it's really complicated. But John is so brilliant. He's so brilliant. That's what struck me this time. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, he uses simple things.

[7 : 05] He's going to communicate who Jesus is with such simple words as light and darkness and word and life. Every culture has those types of ideas.

Every culture. And, you know, and so you could go back and you could read, you know, we have really learned people here like Victor, and he could probably tell you all about the Greek idea of the Logos and all that.

And sure, that was there in John's mind probably, because John would be the first one to say that he's not smart enough. He just learned from Jesus, and he's just passing it on. But you think about, just think about how unbelievably exciting it would be if when they went to the moon, when they went to the moon and they went to leave their plaque, if they found something that obviously was a word on the moon.

Like, it would be electrifying. It would be the front page news of every newspaper on the planet. It would be the lead news item of every news station on the planet.

It would be tweeted a hundred gazillion, and it would break the internet. It would be tweeted so much. And in fact, if there was a picture of it, it would break Instagram. It would be shared so much.

[8 : 17] If they found something that looked like a word on Mars or on the Earth. Why? Well, because a word, what does a word communicate to you? A word communicates that there's a person, that there's a mind, that there's an intelligence, that there's language, that there's communication, that there's relationship.

It would communicate all of these things in a very, very powerful way. One of the problems I had, when I spoke to this tribe, when I preached, and one of the problems I had was I used the word

Holy Spirit.

And they didn't have, they had, I don't know, I'm going to get this wrong. I think they had like 37 different words for spirit. But they didn't have a word for spirit in general. They'd have a way to identify a spirit connected to a tree and a bush and this and this and this and this.

But they didn't have one word for it. That was another one of those words that I was sharing. And it caused this long discussion as to how on earth they were going to try to communicate it. And fortunately or unfortunately, I used that word about 20 times in the sermon actually.

But here you have these very, very, very simple words. And what it's communicating is at the very, very beginning, the God who does exist, one of the best ways to understand that the God who exists is that he is the word.

[9 : 34] And we, if you just think about what it would be like to see word on a planet like Mars, or if all of a sudden one of the space stations that listened to communications from the deep space got something from the deep space that was clearly a word and would be electrifying because if all of it signifies, in the same way, John effortlessly is trying to communicate something very important about God and something very important about human beginnings.

See, every system of thought, either, the first, the thing that causes all things to be is either a who or a what. Christians believe that a what makes no sense.

And as science progresses, everyday science makes the fact, the idea that everything began with a what rather than a who, more and more impossible. It's the thing that doesn't want to be reported in the press.

Every development of science shows that evolution is more and more impossible. All the time.

Every day. Science is just pushing it to become less and less possible. So here we have this wonderful text and he's trying to communicate in a very powerful way.

Listen to it again. 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 anything made that was made.

[10 : 53] 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. I was doing it from memory. I didn't have my glasses. And then it goes on.

It talks about John the Baptist. And then if you just come on down, if you just want to skip down to verse 11, 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.

You see, what John is trying to communicate is that God walked on the earth. And I'm just going to unpack that very briefly in two ways, but could we just see a short video before I do that?

Thank you.

[12 : 16] God's children by adoption and by grace. It will be his accomplishment, his sacrifice, his perfect life, which is somehow offered for us.

And here's two takeaways for us. If you could put the first one up, Andrew. My situation must be vastly worse than I imagine if the Word became flesh to live, if the Word became flesh had to live and die to save me.

I think I'm missing a word there. My grammar bad? Yes. My situation must be vastly worse than I imagine if the Word became flesh to live and die to save me.

It really struck me this week. If God couldn't do it some other way, if he couldn't have just sacrificed an angel or, I don't know, Barb or Andrew or me or something like that and we were all saved, my situation must be vastly worse than I imagine even when I am in my most depressed state if the Word became flesh to live and die to save me and to save you.

Our situation is vastly worse. Our doom is far deeper. But at the same time that this is communicating this to us, it's also communicating something else because, you see, the very same text says that if we put our faith and trust in Jesus, that he gives us the right to become the children of God, that he makes us the children of God when we believe and receive him.

[13 : 52] And if on one hand, this story is in a very odd way, in a very subtle way, communicating how vastly worse our situation is than we ever could possibly imagine that the Word had to become flesh to live and die to save us.

At the same time, when we put our faith and trust in Jesus, what does that say about our security? If you could put up the next point, Andrew. My need for a secure salvation must be vastly greater than I imagine if the Word became flesh to live and die to save me.

Not only is my need vastly greater, but my need for a secure salvation must be vastly greater. And the Lord has provided us this unbelievably secure salvation, the very same God who created all things, who is the source of all life and all ability to think and reason, that very same God who formed and created the planets is the same God who died on the cross to save me.

And when I put my faith and trust in Him, I am putting my faith and trust in something greater than the entire sum of the universe, that which holds all of the universe together.

That is the security of my hope and my salvation when I trust in Him. And one of my themes throughout these last sermons is we Christians in the West and Canada are increasingly being confused by the difference by Canadian Christmas and Christian Christmas.

[15:26] They're two different things. Maybe at one time they were one thing, but now they've become two different things and we're increasingly confused. And I'm not trying to solve what Christian Christmas should be, but if you go back and you look at the Ten Commandments and you see about the way they talk about keeping the Sabbath and the Lord's Day, you see some very basic principle expressed in those commandments about how it is that we're to celebrate the Lord's Day and from that how to celebrate any type of act of Christian remembrance.

And I've summarized it like this if you could put it up. In celebration of His birth, remember with others, rejoice with others, recommit with others, feast with others.

See, in a sense that's what every Lord's Day is to be about. On the Lord's Day we gather together with others to remember, to remember Jesus, to remember the Gospel, to remember who He is, what He's accomplished.

And so when we come on a Sunday, on the Lord's Day, we come to rejoice at who He is and what He's accomplished for us and what He's done for us. And it's not just a matter of rejoicing, but to recommit.

To recommit once again to the Gospel, recommit to Jesus and say, Lord, you know, this week I had a terrible week. I denied you constantly. I was mean and rude to my wife. I was terrible to my kids.

[16:43] I was an atrocious boss or an atrocious guy under a boss or gal under a boss. And I'm just so glad I can come to you once again and I can say, I've really messed up this week. Thank you that my security is in you, Jesus.

And I recommit to you again. I recommit to you. And then the Lord's Day is also a day of feasting with others. And so, you know, I guess all the message is is that we've shared the four fundamental primary stories of Christmas.

And I don't know how Christian Christmas will develop over the years, but I know that however it develops, it will develop around these four pillars where once again, every year we say, we're going to remember once again, the birth of Jesus.

Comes up throughout the year, obviously, different sermon texts and all that, but there's going to be one time a year we're going to always really commit and we're going to remember with others and we're going to rejoice with others and we're going to reconnect with others and we're going to feast with others as we celebrate and allow the fundamental stories to shape who we are and shape how we celebrate, how we remember, how we rejoice and how we recommit.

Just going to show one last video before we, and then I'll say a closing prayer and we'll move on with our service. Just a piece of free advertisement. I don't know, we Anglicans don't get often many chances to pat ourselves on the back so to speak in a humble, unassuming way.

[18:00] The space video was done by an Anglican evangelist. Yes, that is not an oxymoron, Anglican evangelist, by an Anglican evangelist out of England called Glenn Scrivener and this last thing, you're going to see Glenn Scrivener and he's done this other thing as well and as a good evangelist, all of his two things were free.

We had to pay for the middle video but the other two things are completely free. You can go look him up. He's with an organization called Speak Life in the UK and he also has a weekly podcast by the way about how to share the faith and do other types of things which can be very helpful but let's watch this last one and then we'll just close in prayer and we'll keep on with our service.

every idiot who goes about with Merry Christmas on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. I like the darkness at least it's cheap I keep adjusted to the gloom the creeping doom that soon consumes the earth in tombs I hum its tune

assume its tone and make my home right here in the only world we know this world of woe let others throw their festive flings I think I'll keep my five gold rings four calling birds three French hens two turtle doves she loves the doves yeah shove it on the card above no never fear my dear I'll pay it all next year for now we'll drink to Christmas cheer and deck the halls with tinsel bling forget what our tomorrows bring we'll raise a glass of festive sherry eat and drink and be quite merry Merry Christmas everyone and what's your wish from me my son a hamper full of festive fun with snowdrops rainbows furry mittens unicorns and mule and kittens

Santa's sleigh may bring them near but were you good for me this year why yes I think I didn't sink as low as some I know although hey no Father Christmas mind your own business the kids might believe but they are naive I know for certain I see through the curtain but when you strip it all bare what exactly is there see Scrooge looks darkness full in the face embracing the chill but he loses the will to hope the shopper copes better throws off fetters wears garish sweaters but becomes a debtor spending now but nothing later tending down into death's crater Santa offers Christmas cheer the most wonderful time of the year but is it real at least Scrooge knew the deal with the dark in this stark world can we face facts like Scrooge then paint it rouge like the shopper proper banter like Santa but below the ho ho ho can we know a truth beneath treacle good news of great joy for all people are we able to strip back to the stable this fable made flesh our maker enmeshed in the mess to bless us possess us and be heaven's yes to our race to embrace us in grace ever more in our place pledging flesh blood and bone to exchange a throne for a manger endangering all to be present to you to be God's present to you if you're Santa or shopper or any such thing if you're shepherd or Mary or Joseph or king for this the herald angels sing in him the light shines and all is forgiven to you this Christmas child is given let's just stand for a moment stretch a bit and let's close the sermon part in prayer

Father thank you for Jesus Father thank you we confess before you that we often flatter ourselves too much to detect or hate our own sin we flatter ourselves to forget how how doomed we were apart from Jesus and we thank you Father that you saw our great need and you provided the only way for us to be made right with you when you're the the word was made flesh the word became flesh when Jesus came amongst us to live a perfect life that we could not live and die the death that we could not die bearing the doom that we could not bear and eat it all for us out of love Father help us to remember this to recommit to this to rejoice with this and to celebrate and to feast around the memory and this we ask in the name of Jesus your son and our savior amen