

Welcome!
Scriptures: Jeremiah 31:7-14; John 1:1-18
January 4, 2026 – Second Sunday after Christmas

In preparing for my sermon, I learned that the Gospel of John begins with a musical number! Seriously! The verses of the first chapter of John that I read are historically known as a hymn that would have been sung by the community that the author, who we'll call John, would have been a part of. There is some debate on which parts may have been a part of the original hymn that were ultimately written down to be a part of the canonical writing of the Gospel. Nevertheless, the origins are that of a song to celebrate Jesus' origin and coming into the world! Welcome the Christ-Child!

You can see it right? The curtains are closed, someone walks out and recites John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The curtains open and begins the other Gospels telling of the baby Jesus arriving and growing up, preparing for ministry. In the background, the choir/actors are singing, or even whispering, "Welcome the Christ-Child!" Culminating this dance number with those first words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." End scene.

I do not want to reduce or simplify the passage in John, a passage with deep theological and Christological themes, of which scholars and councils fought and

debated over. This passage is speaking about the Incarnation; Word became flesh and lived among us. When I think of the Jesus, God incarnate, I think of it as a re-welcome of sorts. Through Jesus, God says “Welcome! Get to know me! Even if you thought you knew, get to know me again and see what could happen.” Jesus makes getting to know God less daunting, scary, overwhelming, less fill in the blank. The Gospels provide details of the revelation of God, verse 18 notes that Jesus makes God known. This phrase, “make known” is the same root as the word exegesis, which means to explain, interpret, and declare. Jesus brings out or interprets God. However, this re-welcome is not only a re-welcome to God, but a re-welcome to what it means to be human.

The passage of John reminds us of the God of the cosmos and of the law but living among us remind us of two things. The first, echoes of the tabernacle or tent, where God spoke to Moses and where God’s glory was seen in the Hebrew Scriptures. The second is of God’s grace and truth. A call to God’s covenant love and faithfulness. The passage of Jeremiah also calls out what one commentary notes as, “fundamental covenantal attributes of God – love and faithfulness – a gracious love that endures.” Jeremiah 31 is speaking to a people in exile and a vision for the future. A re-welcome to gather God’s people back together, all people, even those who are seen as the most vulnerable. However, God will not only bring them back together but provide sustenance in abundance, where they

will never need or want again. The result will cause dancing, joy, comfort, gladness, and everlasting goodness.

The passage of Jeremiah calls back to Psalm 23, of the God who is a shepherd and provides abundance, but most importantly where God's goodness and mercy will follow, or chase the authors, for the rest of their days. As I mentioned earlier, Jesus is showing us who God is and what our reaction should be as a result. Jesus is seen as teacher, preacher, healer, and much more within the Gospels. Jesus is known to defy "law" when it does not serve the well-being of the people; Jesus feeds people even though they aren't "his responsibility;" Jesus interacts with pariahs and outcasts and even brings them hope. Pushing boundaries, asking questions, and encouraging people to think beyond their worldview. Often it feels like Jesus is sassing people, but there is this kindness in many of the actions and responses provided. Especially to those who are the most vulnerable within society.

Jesus also shows that people contain multitudes. I'm sure Pastor Rebecca has talked about going out to the La Mesa Farmer's Market on Friday nights, and the reactions people have. There are people who completely ignore us, people who think about it but still choose not to take a sticker, others who roll their eyes and walk away, those who are shy but willing, and those who are eager and excited to write something down. It is a way for us to welcome people to slow down or to look inward for a few seconds, to think about their lives, and what they are

thankful for or what brings them joy. Ultimately, we don't know why people choose to stop or not stop, that's not our business. We are looking to share the joy of Christ's welcome, and it's for all people, no matter their reaction.

I won't pretend like the rejections are easy, or sometimes interactions are uncomfortable, but I do see it as an inbreaking of hope in the world. We are welcoming others to know this Jesus. The one in whom there is life, and light, a light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it. A Jesus who provides grace upon grace, and who calls out those who care more about looking the part than actually living out the part. So, let us live out the part! Let us welcome all creation with love, mercy, and grace. I won't pretend that it will be easy or comfortable. I will be the first to admit that is incredibly hard to welcome those who are seen as against me or those like me. It is easy to say, "us" and "them." Even non-humans are easy to forget when talking about the work of God.

However, for us there is also grace, and there is community to lift, support, and step in when needed. For following Jesus means naming injustice and calling out policies that create chaos and harm innocent lives. Caring for the most vulnerable in our communities with our time and our resources. It means asking God to reveal what can be done and being honest with ourselves when know what needs to be done. For today, we live in the hope of the future, where all creation

will be free, where justice and peace will reign, and where all can experience God's everlasting goodness.

On this second Sunday after Christmas, I ask us all again to welcome the Christ-Child, for when we welcome Jesus, we welcome God, we welcome love, and mercy, and grace. When we welcome Jesus, we welcome the light that the darkness cannot overcome. Let the light of Christ shine in our lives! Let us be the welcoming light with our actions, with our resources, with our words, with our songs, and maybe with our stickers. Alleluia and Amen.