

Christmas 1, December 27, 2020, Reflections on Faith and Life

Today's Order of Worship and Sermon are a gift to all of us from Pastor Laurie Skow-Anderson, Bishop of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin. The format is different from mine, but all the information is there. I'm printing this as Page 1, followed by her "Hearts @ Home" worship, followed by her sermon; all of this is two-sided.

"And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth."

Context, context, context! Our faith in God, who reveals himself in our scriptures, is a faith that fits *our* context, just as it was fitting for the contexts in which each part of the Bible was written. We do a disservice to God, the Father Almighty, when we take bits and pieces of the Bible out of context and use them for our own purposes. Every word of the original Hebrew (the Hebrew scriptures, the *Old Testament*) and the original Greek (the Christian scriptures, the *New Testament*) belongs somehow to the "greatest story ever told."

We've learned that in Paul's writings, almost every paragraph begins with "therefore," or "thus," or "for this reason." In order to understand each particular reading, it's necessary to understand what came before. The same idea holds true to the gospel of John. The Greek "kai," which means "and," is used in many places to tie new information to previous ideas. John's gospel is more *theological* and less *earthy* than the other three gospels. Instead of presenting the life and ministry of Jesus, John's focus is on the Son of the Father. Instead of doing "miracles" in John, Jesus performs "signs," all of which point to the Father.

The two bold sentences above (both beginning with **And**) remind us that Jesus, the light, has been and always will be the light of the world, surpassing all darkness. *And* the Word, God-in-the-flesh, lived *and lives* among us *and* is full of grace and truth.

2021 is the Year of Mark in our appointed reading (Year B, after Matthew—A, and before Luke—C). Because Mark is the shortest gospel, we'll hear a lot from John this year. So hold on to these thoughts!

Note: Our annual meeting is scheduled for January 31st. We're hoping to be able to worship in person beginning of January 24th. If COVID numbers are falling at that time, please check with us and see if we're "open for worship."