

The Yes/And of Jesus

Christmas Day

10:30 am - December 25, 2022

John 1:1-14

¹ 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, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome 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.

¹⁰ 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, 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, full of grace and truth.



Bishop William Willimon tells a story of a meeting with a young couple. They came to talk to him about marriage.

They were in *love*. She was a Christian. He was a devout practicing Jew. True to her culture, the young woman said, with some exasperation, “But surely there isn’t any real difference in what we believe. Is there? Except for that Jesus thing.”

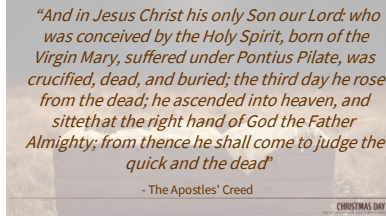
Ah yes, that ‘Jesus’ thing. In one sense, it was such a small thing for this couple. It was a minor point in a complex theology. He was but a single figure in a rich history full of amazing people – Moses, Abraham, David, Solomon, Elijah, Ruth – just to name a few. What is one person, more or less, in that long line?

One could, of course, argue that this Jesus person was a pretty special person. Wise beyond description, brave in amazing ways, uniquely self-sacrificing, loving in ways that we could only dream of, forgiving in ways beyond our understanding. A person, yes, exemplary in every way, but a person.

We would be right. And, at the same time, we would be wrong. There is almost always a “yes, and” when it comes to Jesus. Often words will fail us in the end because of this truth. Words can capture part of the picture, part of the truth, but they always fall short of capturing the whole Jesus thing. Even the creeds, beautiful statements of faith worked out by the best of the best at their time, even they wrestle with a description of Jesus. The longest part of each creed is always devoted to Jesus. And not just because they had a lot to say. It was the longest part because there was always more to say.

Today we rejoice in the “yes, and” of Jesus Christ. As we lean into this celebration, let us pray...

The Apostles' Creed was finalized in about 300 AD. Here is what it says about what we believe about Jesus:



"And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord: who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead"

- The Apostles' Creed

CHRISTMAS DAY

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This is both a statement of who Jesus is and of who he is in relationship to God. We read that Jesus is *"God's only son"* and that Jesus is *"our Lord."* Yes, Jesus is God's son AND he is our Lord. The Nicene Creed takes a deeper dive. Written about 325 AD and then formerly adopted in 381 AD, here is how it speaks of that Jesus thing:

"We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;

he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.”

You might have noticed that the Jesus section of this creed took two screens.

They wanted to really try and define Jesus. They wanted to express their comprehension of Jesus. They wanted to nail him down. The writers of the Nicene Creed should have learned from the writers of the Apostles’ Creed. This Jesus thing defies definitions and explanations. He defies our attempts to categorize him. Do you ever wonder why? I think it is because if we could fully and completely define Jesus, if we could really figure him out, well then, we wouldn’t need him anymore. Jesus would just be one more thing we figured out, one more thing we’d conquered. Then we’d move on to find other mountains to climb, to find better riddles to solve. That is why Jesus remains a “yes, and.”



We do need some handles on this Jesus thing, though, don’t we? We need some way of understanding, of grasping, of relating to Jesus even if we do not have full comprehension. To delve into another way to get a handle on Jesus, we turn to John 1, our gospel text for today. This is a beautiful and flowing, poetic passage. It is a song of praise to the nature of Christ. It is John’s response to the question: Who is Jesus Christ? It is so beautiful and powerful that we are going to hear these words again, a few verses at a time, reveling in the beauty and poetry.

In verses 1-5 we find this opening. Please read along with me: *“¹ 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, and the life was the light of all people.⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”*

John first connects to the eternal nature of Jesus, to the fact that Jesus was there as the Genesis account unfolded in chapter 1, as God spoke the world into being. Here we find our first “yes, and” discovery. Yes, Jesus was there in the beginning, and Jesus is God – *“the word was God.”* Verses 2 and 3 reiterate the eternal and creative nature of Christ. Then in the last half of verse four and in verse 5 we see that Jesus is the light and is life. Yes, Jesus brings life to those who were dead, and he shines light into the darkness of the world. The light of Christ illuminates the darkness of this world, and the darkness cannot overcome the light. The light drives away the darkness. Because Christ came in the flesh, he could understand the darkness of the world and he knew what was necessary to overcome that darkness. It would require a great sacrifice on his part.

Moving beyond the words here and the theology behind them, we ask: What does this short passage mean for you and for me and for all people? As followers of Christ, yes, we know the light and love of Jesus. It dwells in our hearts and flows through our very being. And we also know the darkness.

We are tempted often and at times we slip into the darkness, entering a time of sin. Yet, we do not remain in our sin. The Holy Spirit brings conviction and lead us to repentance. And then the one who came to die for our sins offers grace and washes away the sin, welcoming us back into the light.

Continuing, we read verses 6-9 together, moving forward in the story. Again, please read these verses with me: *“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.”*

In these verses we connect into John the Baptist and the role that he played in welcoming the Christ into the world. John came to testify to the light, to preach out in the wilderness to prepare people for the coming of the kingdom of God. John came to witness to Jesus, to witness to the coming of light and to the coming of the kingdom of God.

Turning to application, what do we gain from these four verses? First, we too are called to play the role that John played. We are called to witness to the work of Christ in our lives, sharing this gift with others. We are called to testify to the power of Christ to change and transform other people’s lives. Like John, our life should witness to the light and our words should testify to how Jesus enlightens our life, bringing hope, peace, joy, and love to bear.

Please read verses 10 and 11 with me: *¹⁰ 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, and his own people did not accept him.*” Here we find

another “yes, and.” Jesus was in the world, creating all things, and yet the world did not know him. Connecting verses 9 to 10, we also see that Jesus gives light to every man and although he was a part of the world that he created, his own people, the Jews, did not recognize him. It is hard to imagine that the force that is woven into the Old Testament, into the words of the prophets and into the actions of God that unfold throughout the Hebrew scriptures, that this person of Jesus was not recognized by the vast majority of the Jewish people. Yet some did recognize the Christ.

These words are as true today as they were the day that John wrote them. Jesus is very much alive and well in the world. There are evidences of his grace and love in abundance. We are evidence of that grace and love. All people are *“his own”* – all of us are created as children of God. Jesus came to his own - to the Jews and to all humankind. Some just don’t recognize this fact. Others recognize it and deny it. Many eyes refuse to see the evidence of God in the world that is before them. Many hearts deny that presence that they can feel in their hearts and souls. Yes, there remains as great a need for the revelation of Christ today as there was in John’s day. And you and I are called to be that revelation of Christ.

Now, read the last five verses with me: *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, full of grace and truth.* "This is where the song really begins to include us in the story. Yes, Jesus came to all people. And it takes a step on our own to fully claim our place in the family of God. We must accept or receive Christ into our hearts in order for him to live in Spirit in our hearts. Then we experience what it means to be *"born of the will... of God."* Then we live in the light and love of his glory.

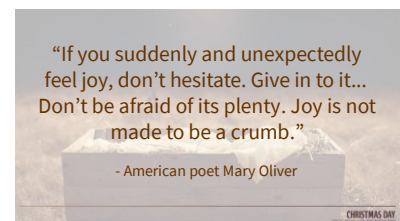
Before we turn to our conclusion, let's take a minute to unpack a part of verse 14. In the original language, *"lived among us"* would have been translated *"tented among us."* Yes, this is a nod to the culture of Jesus' day when many were nomadic. Yes, it is a nod to the time in the wilderness, when God lived with the people in the tabernacle. And it is a nod to the intimacy and presence of Christ that we feel in our lives too. There is an up-close and nearby feeling to the notion that Christ tents among us.

This is what we feel when John sings of the light that is the light of all people. We hold our breaths because we have seen and touched the light, and because we have wept for lack of the light in our lives. In these moments when the darkness begins to creep in, we lean forward, like a plant seeking sustenance from the sun. We are drawn in because we have beheld Christ's glory. Yet at times we do not know him. The darkness has won the moment, but not the victory. We are indeed both acceptors of Christ and deniers of Christ. At times we think Christ's light and love too good to be true and at other times we hope it is too good not to be true.



Yes, we have tasted and have received grace upon grace, and we have wrestled with the ways of the world, with our doubts and fears, with our sin. Yes, we do believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior, and we do lose our grip on our faith from time to time. Yes, we marvel at the love and light of Christ that flows in our lives, and we wonder what faith is all about sometimes. Yes, we have been rescued from the lion's mouth and redeemed from the snares of Satan, and we wonder if its worth the struggle. Yes, sometimes we ponder giving in just a bit on the that Jesus thing, and yet in our hearts we know that faithfully and obediently following Christ is the only path to eternal life.

This Jesus thing, at least according to chapter 1 of the gospel of John, is nothing less than life itself. This Jesus thing is life in all its fullness. This Jesus thing is life in all its depth and meaning. This Jesus thing is really life as we long to live it at our core. We cannot be who we were created to be or who we long to be without Jesus. To close I share a quote from American poet Mary Oliver: *"If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don't hesitate. Give in to it... Don't be afraid of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb."*



This quote speaks of the joy we find in Christ. But I truly believe that we could substitute many words in the place of 'joy.' That is the "yes, and" of Christ. We could sub in peace, hope, or love. We could replace 'joy' with salvation, rescue, redemption, restoration, or reconciliation.

We could say, *“If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel love, don’t hesitate. Give in to it... Don’t be afraid of its plenty. Love is not made to be a crumb.”* Or we could very well say, *“If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel redemption, don’t hesitate. Give in to it... Don’t be afraid of its plenty. Redemption is not made to be a crumb.”* Faith, in all its components, is meant to be experienced to the full.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” Christ is the word made flesh – eternal and everlasting. The light and love of Christ shines in the world. The darkness will not ever overcome the Savior. This day and every day, may we go forth into the world, bringing his light and love to bear. May Christ be our Savior, and may he be the Savior of the world. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. When has feeling Christ’s light and/or love led to growth in your faith?
How can you testify or witness to this so that others can grow in Christ?
- 2) *Pray*. How is Christ calling you to be light and love in the world? Seek guidance and strength in prayer this week that Christ may use you.
- 3) *Study*. Read John 2:29-34. How does this passage add to the “yes, and” of who Jesus Christ is for you?