

ASH WEDNESDAY

February 26, 2020

READING

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He 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 mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

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.

(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.'") Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 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.

REFLECTION

My experience with Lent and the church calendar is limited at best. I grew up a non-Mennonite in a Mennonite town, our family having moved to Canada from South Africa as a child. We attended a variety of churches but my parents were non-denominationalists who came to faith in their adulthood. I was aware that every church had a different name but in my mind, that's as far as the differences went. For my parents, all anyone really needed was God through Jesus, and he could be found in studying the Bible. Christmas marked his birth, Good Friday marked his death, and Easter Sunday was when he came to life again. Everything in between was just another day in terms of Christian significance.

This past Christmas, I decided to tread in unknown waters and embrace (with a good deal of trepidation, I must add) an intentional journey through the Advent season. Again, having yet to find any reference to the Hope candle or its compatriots anywhere in the New Testament, this was uncharted territory for me. But I did it fairly anonymously, by way of an email that would come to me each day from the beginning of Advent to Christmas day, from an author whose

writings I enjoy. Each day, I would crack open my Bible to read along in the various gospel accounts, the lead up to and the story of Christ entering into this world. And I was prompted to think about what it was that I was actually reading. My goal was to see this whole thing with fresh eyes, to discover something new about God, myself, and our relationship, by slowly and intentionally reading through this oft told story.

And low and behold, this story did become new again to me...strange and wonderful, counter intuitive and backwards in so many ways. It amazed me and spurred me on to continue the plain reading of this profound source document...what other strange things would I discover? It was like finally setting aside the thousands of book reviews that I had read, and actually reading the book itself for the first time.

Secondly, I felt connected, in a most mysterious way, to all those other folks out there who were receiving the same email as I was each day, and who were discovering, perhaps for the first time or maybe in a new way just as I was, this story of God entering into real time and space via a helpless baby, to offer us full restoration, unmerited and without any strings attached.

And so I thought of GBC. I'm beginning to see now, in the rhythms of the modern church calendar, similarities to the festivals the Israelites partook of throughout their history, and still to this day. It is a rich tapestry marked by joy and suffering, calamity and triumphant. When God called light into being, he said "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the nights, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years...". Over the sum total of our lives, we will be able to mark the sacred times together, each of us looking back on what might have been personally, a time of distress or joy. And yet, in either situation, we will have been Christ's hands and his love to one another, carrying one another's burdens and washing one another's feet.

Perhaps this modern medium can therefore be another small tool that we use to draw closer to one another and to the God whom we love, serve, and worship. Adding another outing to the calendar for a gathering isn't necessarily feasible for many of us at the moment. But the longing to build relationships and grow within this community, centred around our mutual love of Christ, remains. So my prayer is that we can journey together through Lent via a connecting email; for each of us to read on our own, whether it be early in the morning before the rest of the household awakes, a fresh cup of coffee in hand, or at the end of a long, tiring day, in comfy pants with our feet up on the couch; to reflect, to pray, and to grow together as one body in Christ.

REMINDER

Throughout this week, those who sit down the pew from you, those who always find themselves in the same seat within the sanctuary, those who fill the choir loft, and those who come late and leave early, are gathering around these words to begin a journey towards Christ. We are one in this season, walking and growing together.

PRAYER

God, thank you for your great love for each person that passes through the doors of Grace Bible Church. Whether it is to worship together Sunday morning, to be served at the Community Table every second Saturday, all the times between, or once in a blue moon, we are all your children. Draw us together, teach us something new about who you are and who we are in light of that. May you be glorified through this journey as we seek to know more of you and one another.