

Chris Currie

PW Christmas Service 2023

John 1:1-5

Meditation:

In case you have not figured this out, I like to play the game of how would we celebrate Christmas, the birth of our Lord, without Luke's gospel and the shepherds in the fields and the angels and holy family making their way to Bethlehem. And without Matthew and Joseph's dreams and the Magi making their way to the Christ child. What we have left is what we just heard. We have Mark's gospel which begins with the good news with the adult Jesus coming on the heels of John the Baptist's preparing the way of the Lord. No cute manger scenes or evergreens or mistletoe, but when Jesus comes on the scene in Mark chapter 1 he is a full grown adult and his first miracle is to heal a man of an unclean spirit and to talk to those unclean spirits as he is doing so. So if we had only Mark to go on, perhaps we could persuade Louellen to leave up the skeletons awhile longer and maybe have a few ghosts and goblins and unclean spirits to remember at Christmas.

Our other scripture passage is from John and we might best call this the Ghost of Christmas past, or more accurately, the ghost of creation past, because John sets the stage, not with Jesus' adult ministry and the immediacy of his calling disciples and removing unclean spirits, but at the beginning of all things, before the world began or was created, when there was only God. John tells us Christmas was not a season of the year or a special series of days or even the period of time from Advent to Epiphany, but that Christmas was first and foremost the very first emanation, idea, and primal movement of God. For John, before you or me or the world was created, Christmas was an intentional choice in the heart of God to never be God without humanity; God refuses to be God without us. Christmas is at the heart of that decision and it weaves its way through Jesus coming, Jesus living, Jesus dying, and Jesus resurrection and refusal to let death have the final word. One of my favorite theological thinkers, the medieval theologian John Duns Scotus a medieval monk who taught at the University of Paris reminds us that even if we never would have sinned, God would have come for us, because it is in God's very nature to do so, it is intrinsic to who God is, Christmas is not just about Jesus' human birth 2000 years ago, it is not just about our yuletide festivities now, but it is about something that happens in God in the very beginning, a choice to be for humanity through thick and thin, a choice to come for us (not after we had sinned), but to come for us as God's way of being and acting, a choice to never turn his back on humanity, but to risk his whole humanity on living in solidarity with us. That is what Jesus does in his earthly life from beginning to end, ministering, in the words of the ancient theologian Athanasius, ministering to human beings the things of God, and ministering on our behalf the things of humanity to God. Christmas is the event in our world of what God intended from the very beginning, and it reverberates with ripples everywhere in our world, including here and now in this church and in our life together. May the Christmas that is at the heart of God reverberate in and through your lives in these days, and perhaps just as miraculously, may you see the places in your life that begin to take the shape of God's life, in this time and in all time. Thanks be to God.