

**LIGHT, LIFE AND LOVE** (John 1:1-18)  
Sermon by the Rev. Corinne Hodges  
Sunday, December 28, 2008, St. John of the Cross

“In the beginning...” I can think of no better words for this Sunday, which falls right between two celebrations of new beginnings, the birth of Jesus Christ/his entry into our human world on Christmas and New Year’s, the start of a fresh year. There is so much emphasis put on the New Year in our culture, a time for resolutions and turning over a new leaf. Many of us desperately want a clean slate and new beginnings often bring optimism, hope and relief.

Mike and I used to have a tradition at the beginning of each New Year. We have a friend who is a life coach and she would hold an afternoon workshop, complete with a meal for fellowship. We would reflect on the year past and discuss our dreams and goals for the New Year. This workshop was called “Your Best Year Yet” and in it we discerned the things we wanted to start, things we wanted to have in our life, to do, to be, to say...things we wanted to learn. There were the things we wanted to change, to stop, things we wanted more of, less of. It was an arduous task designing our Best Year Yet and after a few years, not surprisingly, we needed a break. We stopped the physical, written process, but of course the mental process of annual review continues throughout the years.

Our Gospel reading today digs back to the very beginning...the beginning of all beginnings. The time before the origin of creation. You know the story from Genesis: the days before God created humankind, before God created the animals, the earth, the waters, the moon, the sun, the stars and the sky. The time when God had an empty canvas and a palette full of all kinds of colors and textures.

Today in 2008, we can scarcely imagine what the very beginning must have been like. Can you picture a world void of any sign of life as we know it? John’s Gospel helps us to envision such a time and place. Now John’s Gospel is different from the three synoptic gospels of MT, MK and Luke. This is most apparent in how the various gospels begin, in what is called the Prologue. You see in the other gospels,

things are much more comprehensive or factual. MT begins with the genealogy of Jesus Christ; MK, as we've read in Advent, begins with the story of John the Baptist preparing the way for Christ; and LK begins with the birth of John the Baptist and then Jesus. But John's Gospel??? It starts out like a vague though beautifully written poem: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being."

Verbose, contradictory, repetitive? John's Gospel is written in an evocative style, using a different language and symbolism, rather than concrete, easy-to-follow terms. But if we look closely, we realize that there are three things that John is clear about. Three things that pre-existed all forms of creation; three things I will refer to today as the three Ls.

The first L is life. John reminds us that Jesus was in the beginning with God. God and Jesus pre-existed all else. And it was from this life source that all other life was brought into being. Jesus lived and had his being in and through God from the start.

The second L is light. Even in the darkness of a world without a moon and stars, there was a light...and that light was Christ. John tells us that, "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world." Jesus is the light-life source.

Finally the third L...any guess? Love. While the word love does not appear in actual word form in the Prologue, love is written all over the passage. For example, we know that God gave God's only begotten son for us. Such self-offering for the sake of others is given out of selfless love. And God created the universe and all of creation out of love as well.

Life, light and love. What difference do these three Ls make in our lives? **Does it matter that life, light and love through Christ was and always is present?** Think about the low points of the last year, when you were lost and unsure of where to turn. Knowing that God has sent you light in the midst of darkness, life in the midst of death, and love at the times when you feel unloved and uncared for...that makes a difference.

Knowing that no matter how bleak life can get the light of Jesus is always there to sustain you...that makes a difference. Darkness, no matter how dark, cannot overcome the light of Christ. It's like those crazy birthday candles, the trick ones that you blow and blow but they won't go out...Jesus is like that. Always burning, always showing us the way, urging us to have hope and believe.

God works from the point of love. And us? If we are to follow Jesus, we must ask ourselves, "What is the source of my own actions and decisions?" If we approached life through love, what would our lives look like? Personally, I know I would be less hard and harsh, more open and definitely more understanding and patient. You see love makes us more compassionate and less defensive. It makes us vulnerable, which can be uncomfortable. No longer do we have to be "right" and the other person "wrong." Little petty things no longer matter. When we work from love, we soften, are more kind and generous.

I tried this one day as I was out on the road. A car came as close as it could, sliding in between my car in the left lane and a semi in the right. It was so close it was scary. But I had just read the intro to John's Gospel and I remembered this "working from love" theory. So I did not get upset. Instead I said a prayer...and I said it over and over again as I watched that car zigzag in and out of lanes, no doubt shaking up other drivers. I thought to myself...perhaps that driver had a reason to be in such a hurry. I know the feeling of being late and rushed. Perhaps there was an emergency. Regardless of the reason, I could offer the other driver in love the spot he or she so desperately desired. It really was no loss for me once I let go of having to be first, of the rightness or wrongness of it. I discovered that working from love can truly be freeing!

It is time for a new year. Some people look back on 2008 thanking God for blessings, but others are judging what went wrong, what did not go our way, blaming ourselves, others, even God. Well, let's make this year different. Let's each of us start a small ripple in our community. We can't control outside events or other people, but

we can change ourselves. Start from love. Do all you do, make all your decisions with love in mind. Let's make 2009 not only the best, but the most loving year yet!

### **New Year's Blessing**

This new year, may the life of Christ comfort and strengthen you.

May the light of God enlighten your path. And may the Holy Spirit surround you with love in all that you do, in all that you say, in all that you are. Amen.