

“The Word Was Not Recognized!”

Last Sunday, the sermon put a spotlight on how many biblical scholars’ believe John 1:1-14 – often called the “Prologue” was an ancient hymn, which the author of the Gospel of John borrowed and inserted in the beginning of his gospel as a beautiful but unhistorical introduction to John’s telling of his story about Jesus. Last Sunday, I demonstrated how the “Prologue” makes many links with the rest of the Gospel of John, so those beautiful verses have important connections with the rest of the Gospel of John. I pointed out how some of the terms, even in verses 1-5, provide the basis for more fully understanding Jesus and his purpose as described in the whole Gospel of John. John 1:6-11 also reveals several crucial links between the Prologue and the rest of the Gospel.

Among those parts of today’s Scripture, are verses 10-11, in which the subject of the “Word” and whether or not it is recognized is found. Have you ever had difficulty recognizing someone? Maybe you knew the person long ago or you were familiar with the appearance of the person because they were famous. Unfortunately, I have experienced the temporary inability to recognize a few folks. Usually, I justify this to myself by saying I did not recognize someone because something like his or her hair was different from its appearance during the most recent time I had seen her or him. It is embarrassing to not recognize someone you know or should know. When was the last time you did not recognize someone and why?

There are games – tests one can use to help develop recognition skills. Margaret and I have gotten some books and magazines to use with Jordan which have objects hidden in the pictures. Some of the items in those drawings are hard to find. In a similar fashion, our experiences help us recognize someone we have never actually met but who is famous and recognized by many folks.

During my recent vacation I came upon someone I suppose I should have known about but I, frankly, don’t recall ever hearing of before. Here is a photo of this famous someone. [A photo of Santa Goofy with Jordan Clay was projected on the screen]. Anyone recognize him? I mean the taller one. Yes, the shorter one is my grandson, Jordan. Who is the big guy? Maybe I heard of Santa Goofy prior to my vacation but, if so, I simply don’t recall hearing of him.

Let’s take a closer look at what verses 10 – 11 tell us about the difficulty most people have in recognizing the “Word” – **Jesus Christ**. When the “Word” came into the world, the world did not recognize the agent of Creation and his people did not receive him. **Vs. 10-11 state, “The Word was in the world, and though God made the world through him, yet the world did not recognize him. He came to his own country, but his own people did not receive him.”** It is not only ironic but extraordinary how the world “*did not recognize*” the instrument of God’s Creative Work!

Further, it is almost bizarre how the “Word” in the flesh – **Jesus** was not even received by the people of the Covenant with God – people of the Promised Land. **Recognizing and Receiving the part of God’s Nature through which all things are created and loved is central to God’s Purpose for sending the “Word” into the world – having God’s Only Son manifest the Divine Parent’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love for us and all people.**

So, the conclusion of this portion of the Prologue – the failure to recognize or receive the “Word” in the world seems gloomy. Yet, we know that is not the end of the story. Indeed, the Christian testimony is God did not give up when confronted by that negative response. Our Divine Parent’s Patience and Love is a powerful and good example for us. Indeed, what is written in verses 6 - 9 demonstrates how God has worked to facilitate **our recognition and reception of God’s Son – “The Word” – “The Light”**. The Light coming into the world in verses 8 and 9 is the same Light written about in vs. 4 and 5. John the Baptist is mentioned in vs. 6 - 8 and his purpose includes informing everyone about “*The Light*”.

The Baptizer's mission was to tell everyone about the Light (Jesus) so all might believe. The gospel states in vs. 6 - 7, ***“God sent His messenger, a man named John, who came to tell people about the Light, so that all should hear the message and believe.”***

John the Baptist did not come as the Light or Messiah. **Instead, he came “to tell people about the Light” (personified in Jesus). Vs. 8 - 9 clarified, “He himself was not the Light; he came to tell about the Light. This was the Real Light — the Light that comes into the world and shines on all people.”**

These connections between today's Scripture and the story of Jesus' rejection by his people and by the world support my assertion the author of John wrote the Prologue (John 1:1-14). Instead of being proof of the unhistorical nature of the Gospel of John, the Prologue reveals the Truth about why John the Baptist carried out his ministry and the dynamics of how the people responded to Jesus, his ministry, and his purpose.

Preparing for our Christmas celebration, we are called to examine our own lives and our relationship with the ***“Real Light”*** described by our Text. Do we show every day – how we recognize the authority of Jesus Christ and also receive his authority over our lives? Or, do we actually allow the world's false gods and ways to control our lives?

The Creator's patience and love for humanity has been demonstrated in a Self-Giving way through Jesus Christ, the personified “Word” and “Light”. We are called to live out that same type of self-giving love and patience with one another and with persons outside of the community of believers. We are to be open to more light being revealed through God's call to love even those, whom society and human history have denounced.

Unlike the multitude of Santa Goofy photos, people have been taken, there is no photograph of Jesus the Christ from which everyone can recognize him. Yes, there have been many paintings showing one or another artist's vision of what Jesus might look like, but no one living today has ever seen and recorded his true appearance. **How, then, can everyone recognize Jesus as God's Son – “The Word” – “The Light” – the Messiah or Christ?**

Periodically, we have special activities and events, which are good opportunities for us to invite family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, etc. to come as our guests. Next Sunday, December 14th, is not just the Third Sunday of Advent but it is also the Sunday when we will hold our **“Medieval Christmas”** Worship Celebration! I urge each of us to take one or more of these invitations and to deliver or send them to folks, who we know are not currently active in a local church. Doing so will enable them to get a glimpse of the ***“Real Light” – “the Word”*** who came into the world. Each of us are called to be agents of God's Self-Giving Love, who enable those who do not recognize **Jesus Christ – the “Light” – “the Word”** to do so, even though the whole of Creation, Life, and Light have been and are given to us through him. How we welcome and love those hurting and in need of God's Love empowers others to also come to recognize and receive God's Son, Jesus the Christ.

There have been times in the past when the United Church of Christ or this congregation have shown TV commercials to proclaim the Good News of God's love for all people through Jesus Christ demonstrated by Jesus never turning anyone away. Those ads also announced our welcome of all people, as Round Grove United Church's Mission Statement says. Let us put the Truth of those messages into action every day. **Let us demonstrate and show Jesus Christ – “The Word” – “The Real Light” to all people.** Amen.