

John 1:1-5, 14-17

“What Are You Looking At?”

November 29, 2015 (Advent 1)

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Well, the countdown has begun!

Fast approaching it is.

In case you didn't know I'm just going to tell you...because you've got so many days until the big day...**[9:30 am contemporary show star wars countdown slide...]**

...that's right there are only 19 days not counting today until Star Wars: The Force Awakens opens in theaters on December 18th.

Perhaps you thought I was talking about...Christmas?

Don't get me wrong...Christmas is important...it's just that as a kid who saw The Empire Strikes Back in theaters more times than he'd care to admit...December 18th is a pretty big day in my book & December 18th is before December 25th – so from a calendrical perspective...it's more important right now.

The images on screen during the approximately two-minute trailer are scintillating.

And the dialogue piques one's curiosity...

Seriously, I was never more excited than when I saw the trailer for the movie...in case you haven't...here it is...

[9:30 am play star wars the force awakens trailer]

[8:15 & 11 am]

Sans video...

“Who are you?” a female voice asks, “I'm no one” is the response.

“I was raised to do one thing...” a male voiceover “...but now I've got nothing to fight for.”

The antagonist speaks, “Nothing will stand in our way...” looking at a misshapen mask of Darth Vader “....I will finish what you started.”

And the pinnacle in my opinion, “There are stories about what happened,” Han Solo opines,

“...It's true...all of it...” and then the scene I've been waiting for...Harrison Ford as Han Solo appears on screen [my heart leaps]...[the Millennium Falcon makes the leap to hyperdrive]... he continues, “the dark side...the Jedi...they're real...”

And then that female voiceover again, “The Force...it's calling to you...just let it in...”

Please tell me that I'm not the only one with goosebumps right now?

Okay, I'm done geeking out...however there's an analogy here....we get excited for things we await, don't we?

And yes, I'm stretching the whole December 18th is before December 25th out of proportion to make a point – because as faithful followers of Jesus Christ – as dedicated disciples our big celebration day – the day which we anticipate in our liturgical year right now – the moment we're waiting for is that Christmas celebration – when we celebrate God's love revealed to a hurting world in the cry of a tiny child – enfleshed in Jesus the Christ.

So, what does that mean for us?

What difference did Jesus coming make? – that’s the question this Advent’s sermon series is asking, and today we consider the following...Jesus coming showed us Who God is.

The writer of John’s gospel puts it this way, “...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...” (John 1.14)

The Word ~ the *Logos* ~ used both here in verse 14 and first in verse 1 is the Evangelist’s way of drawing together the threads of these opening words – almost hymn like – and bringing these opening thoughts to conclusion.

Here in verse 14 the writer boldly states that to which the reader has been assuming – namely, the incarnation – God in the flesh – the eternal Word “became flesh.”

This is the long awaited moment which shows the Word has decisively moved from the eternal to the temporal.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with god, and the Word was God...” (v. 1)
“...The Word became flesh and lived among us...” (v.14)

In these two verses hold the key to the fourth evangelist’s theology of incarnation.

“The Word was God” is now “The Word became flesh” ~ Jesus is not a mere man, but is the Word of God made flesh, become human.

“The Word was with God” is now “The Word...made his dwelling among us” ~ The Word who now dwelt with God now dwells with “us”...human beings like himself.

“The Word lived among us” is also rich in Old Testament associations.

It recalls God’s promise to dwell with God’s people (see Exodus 37:27).

It is from the same root as the noun for “tabernacle” or “tent” ~ the place where God spoke to Moses & where God’s glory was seen during those wilderness wanderings.

Perhaps you recall these experiences between God, Moses and the People?

In seminary, I had the privilege during an internship between my first and second year to participate in a vacation Bible school, in which they studied the Tabernacle.

Together we learned about the intricacies of that portable sanctuary called the Tabernacle.

There were strict instructions as far as the Tabernacle’s construction was concerned.

It was a three segmented structure with an outer court – an inner court – and a smaller section known as “The Holy of Holies.”

The Holy of Holies contained the Ark of the Covenant into which were the remnants of the Ten Commandments.

Moreover though was the placement of Tabernacle among the community.

The Tabernacle was to be in the center of the community – in the middle of God’s people – and upon its completion God visibly resided among the community when the pillar of fire by night and cloud by day descended over and rested upon the Holy of Holies.

Upon seeing this the people knew God was in their midst.

Their instructions were such that when the fire or cloud moved it was their signal to break camp and follow.

When it stopped they stopped.

When it moved they moved.

So upon hearing these words in John’s gospel the people would hear this remnant...

“The Word became flesh and *tabernacled* or *tented* among them.”

They would then come to understand that in this man Jesus the glory of God resided.

They would see it, if you will, to say that in this man something has awakened and reminded them of who they are and who they are to follow –

for in him is a light that darkness cannot dampen

in him is grace upon grace

in him is life...

Where he goes they ought to go.

Where he leads they ought to follow.

When he moves they are to move...When he stops they are to stop.

How might this effect and impact our Christmas?

How might our Christmas be different if we saw or remembered this good news for ourselves?

Would we interact with family in a different way – not for what we can get...rather for what we can experience together?

Would we interact with strangers or acquaintances in a different way – not for how much time they might take out of our day...rather for what we might reveal to one another about God’s grace in this world?

Would we interact with co-workers in a different way – not for what we need to do to get the job done...rather for what may be going on in their lives that is in need of hearing the Good news of the One who is with them even in life’s dark times?

Would we interact differently in the world if we were willing to remain open to God’s presence long enough to pause when God pauses and rest in the moment of what God might be trying to reveal through the interactions we have on a daily basis?

This is the time of year that will be filled with opportunities for us to get together with others from office parties, to dinners, to programs, to concerts, and a whole slew of other gatherings.

I wonder if we might make it a point to look for ways in these moments to share love or at the very least grace upon grace.

For we must not forget the reality of this great news is that we celebrate light and life coming to us that cannot be extinguished.

Social psychologist Christena Cleveland has shares the following in her blog:

In post-Ferguson America, now more than ever, we must rescue Advent from its Western cultural captivity. I sigh with relief when I'm reminded that Advent isn't what so many of us think it is. We've been tricked by chocolate-filled Advent calendars and blissful Christmas pageants that gloss over the very real evil that makes the Messiah's coming so very necessary, so very loving and so very heroic.

Advent isn't a holiday party. It doesn't pressure us to conjure up a hopeful face, ring bells and dismiss the foulest realities we face. *Advent isn't about our best world, it's about our worst world.*

But we do the Light a disservice when we underestimate the darkness. Jesus entered a world plagued not only by the darkness of individual pain and sin, but also by the darkness of systemic oppression. For many, the darkness of long-standing oppression had extinguished any hope for liberation.

It was into this "worst world" that the Light-in-which-We-See-Light was born, liberating the people from the terror of darkness. So it is in the midst of our worst world that we, too, can most clearly see the Light, for light shines more brightly against a backdrop of true darkness. (-- "*Advent/Night.*" Christena Cleveland, November 28, 2014. christenacleveland.com.)

During these days filled with long nights, I remind myself of words which speak to me about the ultimate hope for which we prepare in Advent. Landrum Leavell writes, "Have you ever thought that light is aggressive? It is. When you open a curtain in a lighted room to the outside darkness, the light spills out ~ darkness does not spill in. Light pushes back darkness."

"All things came into being through him," John writes, "and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1:3-5)

May we carry light this Advent – This Christmas...

Whether or not the following story is authentic its message may help us avoid a potential pitfall this Christmas...

It goes...

A man was out Christmas shopping with his two children. After hours of looking at row after

row of toys and everything else imaginable; and after hours of hearing both children asking for everything they saw on those many shelves, he finally made it to the elevator both kids in tow. He had hit the wall and was feeling the *bah-humbug* of Christmas.

Overwhelmed by the pressure the family often felt, he waited for the elevator to arrive...he pondered the gravity of the holiday: to make every party; taste all the holiday food and treats; get the perfect gift for every single person on the shopping list; make sure they didn't forget anyone on the card list; and by all means to respond to everyone who sent them a card...

In mid thought the elevator doors opened to reveal an already crowded car. He pushed his way into the car dragging the two kids in with him along with all the bags of stuff. When the doors closed, he couldn't take it anymore and muttered aloud, "Whoever started this whole Christmas thing should be found, strung up and shot."

From the back of the car a quiet voice...a calm voice...a child's voice responded, "Don't worry we already crucified him."

It was a deafeningly quiet ride down on that elevator.

"The Word became flesh and lived among us..."

"The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it..."

"From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace..."

May it be so this Advent.

May a driving force Awaken within us this Christmas which compels us to share light with those we meet.

This Force...It's calling to you...Let it in! ... And then...Let it out!

Amen.