

Second Sunday after Christmas

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT-FROM LAW TO GRACE

John 1:[1-9] 10-18

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Analysis by Steven Kuhl

[1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was in the beginning with God. 3All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. 6There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.] 10He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. 14And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. 15(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") 16From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

DIAGNOSIS: Darkness: Fixated on the Law Given through Moses

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis – *In the Dark: “The true light...yet the world did not know him” (v. 10)*

The initial problem, which is still with us today, is that the true light and life of the world, Jesus Christ, has come into the world and yet “the world did not know him.” This is true in spite of the fact that there are plenty of God-given messengers who do their best to make him known-human agents, for example, like John the Baptizer (vv. 7-8), an immediate witness, and Moses (1:45), a “prophetic” witness. How careful they are to always distinguish their role as witness to light and life from that of the One who is the true light and life itself. “He who comes after me, ranks ahead of me” (v. 15), insists John the baptizer. Yet, how often those messengers seem to fail, much to their distress, and fail not because the world doesn’t like them (though it’s true that some of the world doesn’t like them) but because part of the world (specifically, the world’s religious, those who like to think of themselves as “God’s own,” or even the “Word’s own”) prefer the witnesses over the One to whom they came to bear witness. Indeed, it is precisely those who think of themselves as “his own” (though in truth they are still in the dark about him) that this text directly addresses.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis – *Of the Dark: “The true light...and his own people did not accept him.” (v. 11)*

Does that part of the world that claims God as its own (the world’s religious) really prefer the witnesses? Not really, though that takes some explaining which also exposes a deeper problem. It’s not just that the world doesn’t “know” Jesus, the Word-made-flesh, but that “his own” (the world’s religious) won’t “accept him,” that is, accept him for the kind of “Jesus,”

i.e., savior, he came to be. What the world seems to prefer is neither the light nor the witnesses to the light. Rather, the world seems to prefer “darkness” over light (3:19). Darkness here is not primarily outward evil, but the cloak behind which evil and sin hides. But a great sophism now comes into play. The world’s religious cloaks it’s evil by appealing to or trusting in Moses and the Word of the Law as the grounds of it’s salvation-and does so precisely against Jesus the Word of Life and Light (cf. 9:28). Notice, for example, the great flattery the world’s religious of John’s day give to the likes of Moses and the Law. (Today they may even seek to spotlight it in courtrooms.) They argue that because the Law came first, chronologically speaking, it is thereby also first soteriologically speaking (cf. cf. 9:28-9). When push comes to shove, they rely on the law as the Word that justifies. But note, even more, the way they flatter themselves. They presume that they can keep the Law and thus claim on that basis the status of “children of God” (v. 12). They ultimately accept the law given through Moses as the means to this end, and not the grace and truth of Jesus.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis – *Darkness: “The Law INDEED was given through Moses” (v. 17)*

But flattery of Moses and the Law will ultimately get the world’s religious nowhere. Indeed, that kind of faith will suffice only to seal their fate with darkness. And what is that darkness? It is the condition of the world as Jesus sheds light on it, as in his encounter with Nicodemus. The world stands “condemned already” (cf. 3:18). The Law given to Moses does not save, but “accuses,” that is, it was given first of all to confirm this fact (cf. 5:45). The text is emphatic that “the law INDEED came through Moses,” but NOT as a means of salvation, but as a DARK WARNING of the pervasiveness of condemnation. No amount of flattery of the messenger will change the fact being

delivered in the message.

PROGNOSIS: Light: Drawn to Grace and Truth through Jesus Christ

Step 4: Initial Prognosis – *Light: “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it” (v. 5)*

Into this world of darkness, sin, and condemnation comes Jesus Christ, the Word become flesh, “the true light, which enlightens everyone” (v. 9). Truth be told, we wouldn’t ever have known the depth of the preceding Diagnosis without the enlightenment of the now-to-come Prognosis. For one cannot really know how dark it is, until that darkness is eclipsed by light. Moreover, we cannot know what living is all about until death, all that diminishes life, is overcome. Because this is what Jesus does in his death and resurrection, he is true life and light for the world. The brilliance of his light and the profundity of his life are described by a single word: “glory” (v. 14). In the cross, Jesus enters the darkness of sin and death that pervades the world. Indeed, because the world had known nothing but this darkness and death, it mistook it for light and life. In Jesus Christ, then, “truth” emerges in all its “fullness” (vv. 14, 17). The sin (our dark condition), condemnation (the law’s warning) and death (the law’s sentence) are revealed as truth (cf. 7:19-24). But more, grace also emerges-and emerges in abundance, “grace upon grace” (v. 16). Indeed, grace emerges in such a way that it creates a new truth that overcomes the old truth: resurrected life. In the resurrection, sin, condemnation, and death are overcome, not through the law but through Jesus Christ crucified and raised. The darkness of the world could not overcome him and so he is true life and light for the world, which neither darkness nor death could overcome.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis – *Of the Light: “Seeing his glory” (v. 14) is “believing in his name” (v. 12)*

What Christ has accomplished for the world generally is accomplished for the world personally, in us, the world's religious, as we believe in his name as the source of life and light-in a word as we "glory" in the Word-become-flesh. Faith, as John describes it here, is true enlightenment. We not only see the light dimly from afar, wondering what it could be. Rather, by faith we are now "of the light", that is, "children of God," people, who through faith in the only begotten Son, are as "close to the Father's heart" as the Son himself.

Step 6: Final Prognosis – *Shedding the Light in the world: "John testified to him and cried out" (v. 15)*

Our life of faith is lived in the world as people who shed light on the world, that is, who give testimony to Christ. Like John (cf. 3:25-6) and Moses, we too need to be on our guard against the flattery of the world's religious who would seek to co-opt us or Jesus' grace to their darkened, dimwitted understandings and agenda. Our life of faith will always be active in shedding light in the world so as to distinguish clearly between law and grace, darkness and light, death and life. We may find ourselves saying "no" to popular expressions of religiosity in the public square, especially, on the one hand, when that religiosity dimwittedly equates Christianity or the principle witness of the Scriptures (cf. 5:39-47) with the keeping of the law or, on the other hand, when it naively undermines the necessary correlation of repentance and grace. But even more, we will find ourselves saying "yes" to people encumbered by darkness and law for whom the good news of Christ's grace and truth is too good to pass up. "Of course," we will tell them, "the law indeed was given through Moses; [BUT]," we'll go on to explain, "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."