

A Positive Self Position

John 1:1-13, 19-28 In the beginning, was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁹ This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰ He confessed and did not deny it, but he confessed, "I am not the Messiah." ²¹ And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." ²² Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³ He said,

"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
'Make straight the way of the Lord,'"

as the prophet Isaiah said.

²⁴ Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵ They asked him, "Why, then, are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" ²⁶ John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷ the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandal." ²⁸ This took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

The prologue of John is like the musical overture of a well-constructed Symphony or Opera. You see, the overture contains all the musical themes of the musical piece, but it is not until the listener ventures into the composition that they fully understand what the composer is trying to convey. This Prologue contains all the elements found inside the Gospel.

The He in verse 2 is, of course, Jesus. Jesus is Word; God spoke the universe into being in Genesis 1. In Him was Life, and this life was the Light of the world. This is profound. Jesus is Word, Life, and Light. This is one place I think the KJV bible has a more profound translation. The KJV says VV. 5, "And the Light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." The changing of a word in translation can cause one to ponder a deeper meaning of a passage. For this reason, I encourage those who engage in theological discussions to read and study scripture in different translations. Even if you can't read the Greek original, you can gather a

wider theological meaning from different translations and see how different Hebrew or Greek words are translated.

Illustration: My language professor told us this story of a student; her husband was in the military, stationed in the middle east on a battleship. The thought of him at night on the ocean surrounded by darkness gave her depression. While translating Genesis, she discovered the power of a word. The word was, לַיְלָה [lā-yə-lāh]. Layelah is the Hebrew word for night. You see, in the story of creation, the light didn't just dispel the darkness; it tamed the darkness, so much so that it received a name. Before, it was just the void... This one word changes the student's entire outlook on nighttime, and because the darkness is no longer void, it is somehow transformed in her mind. After this epiphany, she wrote it is a beautiful thing to be surrounded by Layelah.

A name generates affection by moving something from the realm of generality into the realm of particularity. When God created Humankind, he gave that person a name, Adam. And, in turn, gave Adam the power to name all the creatures. Creatures of the sea became Fish, and Creatures of the land became Cattle and Creepy Crawlers. Those are my loose Hebrew translations. 😊

One word can build a universe or create a safe Eden for humankind. We see it in the first words of today's scripture, "In the Beginning." This makes one immediately think of Creation, and God's awesome power. If I said, "All rise" for the honorable..." you would imagine a courtroom, or if I said, "Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today..." you might think of a wedding. German Theologians call this "Sitz im Leben," or situation in life. A few words can transport our imaginations.

During Advent, we prepare for God's Word becoming flesh. And the Word was given a name, Jesus. The act of naming the Son of God brings God from the realm of generality into the realm of particularity and allows us to know God on a more intimate level. And that knowledge begins with John the Baptist.

John appears as the first witness to Jesus in vv.6-9 and comes to foretell of Jesus. And this will enlighten the world. vv.10-11 tells us the people who are Jesus' people will hear the Word, but they will not be swayed by him.

This, if you think about it for a minute, is reminiscent of the darkness not comprehending the light.

vv.19-28 is a testimony of John. More than just a religious testimony that will bring people to God, it has a dimension of legal accusations, because those asking John are from, what John calls, "The Jews." This we learn further down to mean the Pharisees. As you read the book of John, you will find that both John and Jesus are plagued by accusations from "The Jews."

This interrogation of John begins with a question, "who are you?" John is quick to respond because he doesn't want anyone to assume that he is the Messiah. He also states that he is not Elijah or the Prophet. Unlike the way the other gospels name John, in our lesson today, John identifies himself by the words of Isaiah. 40:3 "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord."

They ask him then, "why are you baptizing?" It is at this point that John is done playing games. He turns the focus to where it should be, Jesus. He tells them that he baptizes with water. And then says, "^{26b}Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷ the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandal." John was aware of his place in the story of Jesus. He understood who he was and didn't try to rationalize himself into something or someone else. Even if people thought he may be.

How many of us can say we know exactly who we are? That we have not rationalized our "SELF" into a story of something bigger than it really is. Just as the darkness cannot comprehend the light, we sometimes cannot comprehend what God is calling us to be.

Studies have shown that in both academics and in the workplace, people will cheat or take shortcuts. Not to the farthest as they can get away with it, but only to the point that they still feel like a good person. Subconsciously they will try to maintain a positive self-concept. They will

rationalize the cheating as an “honest mistake” in order to maintain a sense that they have done nothing wrong. I used to tell Sebastian that there is no such thing as a good kid, only those who get caught and those that don’t. Because I wanted him to understand that his being a good person wasn’t something his mother or I could control. It is ultimately him that has to decide to **do good** in this world, and with God’s grace, he could actually **be a good person**.

John’s message starts with the assumption that we are unable to maintain a positive self-concept on our own. Trying to do so only accentuates our guilt. The path forward is not a proper defense of our actions, but a turning away from our guilt.

John is an example that we should heed on this second Sunday in Advent. We should embrace the Word who has, is, and will come. The Light of God that scatters the darkness into incomprehensible nothingness. We should acknowledge that we are only human, and we need that Light and that Word to show us the way. Because if we don’t, we are left in nameless darkness, a void.

There are many other examples of humanity as a group losing its positive self-concept. Our modern world is riddled with stories of injustice among the poor, disenfranchised, or what the Bible calls, “The lowly.”

Systemic racism, systemic bias, the idea of Position in society, caste systems, human trafficking, fear of the other, the idea of borders, or who “deserves” basic human rights of clean water, food, healthcare, or shelter. All of these things show us, whether we see it in ourselves or not, that as a species, we haven’t changed much since the writer of John wrote the preamble of this Gospel.

We can pass laws, change public systems, and even make sensitivity and boundary training mandatory in the workplace, but until we step into the Light of Jesus, and understand our place in God’s kingdom, we will never have a true positive self-position.

This morning I ask you this; when have you rationalized a behavior because it wasn’t who you are as a Christian? This Advent season, take time to stop, self-assess, and ponder the character of John the Baptist. Are we actively preparing for Christ to come? Are we mentally preparing to

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be what God has called us to be? I hope and pray that we have and continue to do so, In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.