

The message given by Rev. Dr. Tom Zoelzer on Sunday, January 3, 2010 based on John 1:1-18.

### The WORD That Keeps on Giving

The first night, the first night,  
The night that Christ was born,  
His mother looked into his eyes and saw  
Her maker in her son.

The twelfth night, the twelfth night,  
After Christ was born, the wise men found the child and knew  
Their search had just begun.

Eleven thousand, two fifty nights,  
After Christ was born  
A dead man hung in the child's light  
And the sun went down at noon.

Six hundred thousand or thereabout nights,  
After Christ was born,  
I looked at you and you look at me  
But the sky is too dark for us to see  
And the world waits for the sun.

But the last night, the last night  
Since ever Christ was born,  
What his mother knew will be know again,  
And what was found by the three wise men,  
And the sun will rise and so may we,  
On the last morn, on Christmas morn,  
Umpteen hundred and eternity.

Several years ago, I did some research at the end of the year and I discovered that I had said over 100,000 words in my sermons that year! Wow! That seems like a lot! I like to preach, but 100,000 words seem like a marathon!

Yet, there is much to say when it comes to Jesus Christ. So perhaps 100,000 words are not nearly enough to speak about the good news of God through Jesus Christ! We have much to talk about!

Words are powerful. Words can educate, inflame, comfort, distort, bring joy, bring pain. Words are important.

In scripture today, the gospel of John claims that Jesus is the WORD and this is the WORD that keeps on giving. This gospel does not have a birth story about Jesus. It does not have any parables in it and only a few of the miracles and heals described in the other gospels. It is the most theological of the 4 books about Jesus. What it has is signs and words "*so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name*" as John 20 verse 31 puts it.

This book about Jesus begins the same way that the book of Genesis begins – "in the beginning." But instead of saying, "In the beginning when God created," it says, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" John makes the claim that Jesus – the Word of God made flesh – was with God from the beginning. John promotes the idea that Jesus' words are God's words and through those words comes light and life. It is the Word that keeps on giving!

John makes the claim that if Jesus is the light of the world, then we are invited to not only believe it but to live by that light.

Belief is about coming to have conviction about something and acting on that conviction. A Christian is someone who comes to believe that

Jesus has light to live by and then lives by that light. So we are called to first believe it and then act on it. The acting part is always the challenge.

Faith in God through Christ seems to first call for a personal piety where we take time to be "in the spirit" with God – a time of personal devotion and reflection. Faith in God through Christ also seems to call for a moral code of loving God and loving neighbor as you love yourself. But faith in God through Christ also seems to have some social implications as well.

When I read Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 for example, it seems to speak about anger. Jesus teaches that that when we are angry, it is as serious as murder. So we are invited to give up our anger, turn it over to God, and seek reconciliation. We also read that our words can insult and are liable for judgment, and that when we come to the table to bring our gift and realize that someone has something against us, we are to leave our gift and go and seek reconciliation and then come to the table. Jesus also teaches us to be faithful in our marriages, to not take retaliation when attacked, to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. This all comes from one chapter in the book of Matthew from the words we say are the life and light that comes from God. Living it is always the hard part!

We began a new decade a few days ago. 2010 is upon us. Every once in a while things seem really different. The things that worked for the last few years don't seem to be working now, and the assumptions about life and economics seem different. It feels like we have turned a page in our culture and in our society. Perhaps not. But things seem to be

different. How are we going to respond? Shall we keep doing things the same old way or try a different way?

Well, if we are going to believe that Jesus the Word and light of God made flesh, I think it means we practice the ways of Jesus. Today is a day to begin! It begins with – I believe in God and that Jesus is the light of the world for me. Then it is about studying what Jesus taught and practicing it – even when it seems crazy and strange. If we are going to say that Jesus is the light of the world, then we are invited to live it. The idea is that if we do, we will be better, life will be better, the world will be better. Do we believe enough to try?

A Professor stood before his philosophy class and had some items in front of him. When the class began, wordlessly, he picked up a very large and empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it with golf balls. He then asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed that it was.

So, the Professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles rolled into the open areas between the golf balls. He then asked the students again if the jar was full. They agreed it was.

The Professor next picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else. He asked once more if the jar was full. The students responded with a unanimous "Yes."

The Professor then produced two Pepsi's from under the table and poured the entire contents into the jar, effectively filling the empty space between the sand. The students laughed.

"Now", said the Professor, as the laughter subsided, "I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life."

"The golf balls are the important things - your family, your children, your health, your friends, your faith - things that if everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full."

"The pebbles are the other things that matter-- like your job, your house, your car. The sand is everything else - the small stuff. If you put the sand into the jar first", he continued, "there is no room for the pebbles or the golf balls."

"The same goes for life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important to you."

"Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Play with your children. Take time to get medical checkups. Take your partner out for dinner. Play another 18. Take time to help your fellow human beings. There will always be time to clean the house, and fix the dishwasher."

"Take care of the golf balls first, the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand."

When he had finished, there was a profound silence. Then one of the students raised her hand and with a puzzled expression, inquired what the Pepsi represented.

The Professor smiled. "I'm glad you asked. It just goes to show you that no matter how full your life may seem, there's always room for a couple of Pepsis with a friend."

It's a new year! Life is an adventure. Life is meant to be lived, experienced, and a challenge. Life is about making choices and deciding what to value, what is important, and pursuing dreams. Be faithful to the light of Christ and see what blessings come your way this year! Amen!