

12.25.2024 Christmas Day (John 1, Hebrews 1)

Ronald Reagan used to love to tell a story about a couple of anxious parents, who just before Christmas visited a psychiatrist's office due to a concern regarding their identical twin boys. It seems that one of the sons was a continual pessimist, and the other an unwavering optimist. They were wondering how to get the two boys on a more even keel. The psychiatrist advised the parents, this Christmas, to give the pessimist a room filled with all the best toys, everything he asked for and more, and to the optimist, a room filled with horse manure and maybe a shovel, but that's it. The parents did as they were instructed, and this was the result on Christmas morning...

In the first room, the parents found their pessimistic son slouched in a chair with a dejected look on his face. He hadn't even opened one present. He said to his parents, "What's the use? I probably won't like what I find, and if I do, you probably won't let me keep it." The parents quickly made their way to the other room, hoping that the prescribed treatment worked more effectively on their optimistic son. When they reached him, they found this son with a big smile on his face shoveling just as fast as he could. He said to his parents, "With all this horse manure, I know there's just got to be a pony in here somewhere!"

If you committed that story to memory, you could re-tell it many times over the course of your life, because of the way it relates to so many different types of people and circumstances. It relates to parents who've experienced that anxious feeling about how their kids are turning out, as well as to parents who've taken extreme measures in an attempt to alter a child's behavior. The story relates to those of us who have siblings, and have looked at our brother or sister and wondered how children with the same parents, who grew up in the same house, can be so very different. The story relates to the pessimists who have missed out on blessings that were right there in front of them, and to the optimists who have been fooled time and again by their own wishful thinking.

That story relates to so many different people in diverse circumstances, and this morning, I would suggest there's a lesson found there that pertains to all of us, a lesson about truth, and the importance of seeking objective, absolute

truth. We live in a society where many people no longer believe in absolute truth. They view truth as something that is relative, that is always subject to our own individual interpretation, but this simple story paints a vivid picture of how good human beings are at deceiving themselves, and how quickly our own finite, fallen, human perspective can lead us astray. For example, the pessimist in this story has defined his own truth, and is certain that he has nothing of value, but the truth is, his parents purchased everything he asked for and more. The optimist is certain that he has exactly what he wants, but the truth is, he has nothing but a shovel and a room full of horse manure. From our perspective, like the parents, we can see the big picture and we know that these boys have deceived themselves, that their truth is not the truth at all, and so this story illustrates the danger of defining truth based on our own limited perspective.

We all need a way to avoid self deception, and the Scripture passages that we read on this Christmas Day help us see that God has provided the way, by revealing to fallen humanity, the absolute, eternal Truth that is meant to be the bedrock of our lives. In the Gospel passage, St. John describes the Son of God as the Word spoken in creation, made flesh. In those magnificent, familiar verses, John reveals God's infinite perspective by taking us back to a time and place, when there was no time or place. He takes the reader back into eternity, before the creation of time, space, or matter. He takes us to an existence of God, and nothing else. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made"* (John 1:1-3).

These words help us understand God's perspective yesterday, today, and forever. In them we recognize the Creator/creature distinction, that God's ways are higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9), for He stands outside the finite limits of space, time, and matter. From His timeless, infinite perspective the Truth cannot be obscured, and in the Person of Jesus Christ, the Word spoken in creation, made flesh, God communicates objective, absolute Truth to the world. As we read in the epistle to the Hebrews, God spoke to ancient people in different times, different places, and in different ways, but now, *"in these last days"* the Father has spoken *"unto us by His Son"* (Hebrews 1:2).

God has spoken the Truth, and as people who do not want to be deceived, as people whose desire is to build our lives on Truth, we should ask ourselves the question: Who is more reliable? The optimist who has been fooled time and again by their own wishful thinking, the pessimist who misses out on blessings that are right in front of them, or the Word of God, the Son through whom the Father has spoken, the Creator who entered His creation. Who is more reliable, the Creator or the creature? As we celebrate the unimaginable miracle that is Christmas Day, may our faith be placed not in ourselves, but in the Word who *was with God*, and *was God* in the beginning - the only Truth that we can trust absolutely.