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SERMON TITLE: "The Beginning: Do You See God?"

SCRIPTURE: John 1:1-5

DATE: January 7, 2018

Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

READ John 1:1-5, Genesis 1:1-4, Psalm 104:1-5

Did you ever go away for a few days to be in nature—perhaps to camp under the Milky Way, so vast that you feel near heaven; almost a part of it. Or, perhaps your choice is the seaside to soak up some rays or take a late night walk with the moon glistening on the waves. The experience makes your heart beat a little stronger or brings a smile of delight or gives you a special sense of longing for God. Have you had such an experience?

You have connected with God.

I can remember once being at the San Diego Zoo. In that perfect weather and rich variety of dozen of plants and animals, I was suddenly aware of God through this display of God's power and creativity. It was as if I was seeing a little of Eden and a little of what Moses must have seen in all God's animals. I felt that a small window had opened to the brilliance of God for a fleeting moment.

Have you ever felt like you saw a little window of God and it was so good?

C. S. Lewis called these experiences **Joy**, with a capital J. His own experience of Joy happened as a child. In Belfast where he grew up, winter was long and dreary. He and his brother spent most time indoors. One day his brother brought in a lid from a cookie tin that he had made into a miniature garden. Lewis was spellbound by the garden. He described it as cool, fresh, dewy, and exuberant. We might say it "grabbed him." Later he described it as a connection with the goodness of creation and an unfallen world. That experienced lasted forever in his memory.¹

Have you ever felt a connection with God's world that just sort of opens up out of the ordinary? That is seeing God's light.

It's like when you go to bed and the whole room is absolutely dark—especially when you've been sleeping and

you wake up and the room is even darker. You can see nothing. But you need the "lu" as the English say; the "WC."

So you get up and stub your toe on the chair and then step on the dog's squeaky toy and trip over the towel you left on the floor. You know where you are going; you just can't see it.

Isn't it great when a full moon is out and someone left the blinds open? Or, when you turn the corner and there's a light? Isn't it great to be able to see in the darkness?

Seeing your way in the light is pure joy compared to tripping in the dark.

Genesis 1 proclaims that God brings light to darkness. That proclamation, "Let there be light" announces God's will to bring life, joy, justice, and deliverance to you and me in this world. That's what the Hebrew word for light means. It's a whole package of good.

The light given on the very first day is not that of the sun or moon, but it is the light of God's Presence. You know how it can be light on a cloudy day or before the sun comes up or after it goes down? It was that sort of light.

It keeps the world from tottering.

God's very presence brought the light. The Psalmist described it as "God is wrapped in a robe of light."

The light came through this "ruach," or wind of energy. Jesus described it to Nicodemus, a spiritual leader of Israel: "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (Jn 3:8).

In other words, God initiates this life and light by sending the Spirit.

So the earth was unformed dark chaos. This wind that is the breath of God or Spirit of God swept over the water. God's voice shatters the cosmic silence and blows back the chaos. All of this happens at God's initiative. **That's love.**

¹ Devin Brown, *A Life Observed: A Spiritual Biography of C. S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2013), 21-22.

Imagine God blowing a strong wind; God's Spirit sweeping through the chaos or darkness or confusion or doubt or struggle in your life. Imagine yourself being trapped by some negative circumstance and God's Spirit sweeping over your difficulty like God swept over the waters of the Red Sea. Remember how Israel was cornered with the Egyptian army bearing down on them and *the Spirit* blew back the Red Sea so the people could walk safely through.

It's like Dunkirk in World War II. Three hundred thousand Allied troops were trapped on the French beach with the German army bearing down on them. At most, it was thought that only 3,000 men could be rescued. Winston Churchill and his commanders knew they needed a miracle. They needed deliverance. They needed boats to move 300,000 soldiers across the English Channel. They needed cloud cover to protect them from the darkness of German bombers. So, God's breath, wind, and Spirit swept over the water bringing dense cloud cover and swept into the hearts of willing citizens who had small fishing boats and together they rescued those troops.²

God initiated that sort of plan the very first day of this planet. God brought:

- Deliverance from the dark
- Life from nothingness
- Justice out of chaos
- JOY with a capital J

Today we begin the book of John. John knew the Scriptures—Genesis and the Psalms and all the books in between. John knew Jesus personally. There is no doubt about that fact. He was a disciple who began following Jesus perhaps as young as a teenager. He took care of Jesus' mother after Jesus ascended to heaven. John lived to age 90, which would have been into the 2nd Century. His book is commonly dated as written sometime around the turn of the century, give or take twenty years either way. ☺

The Church Father, Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, was John's student. Polycarp was born in 69 A.D. and was martyred in 155 A.D. Polycarp testified that John had known Jesus and written a Gospel. Irenaeus of Lyons, about 175 A.D. mentions that John wrote his gospel after the others while living in Ephesus.³ John wanted to convey who Jesus is. His Gospel begins this way. Hear it in light of Genesis 1:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of men (mankind). The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (Jn 1:1-5).⁴

Notice the similarities to Genesis 1.

Jesus is the most utterly unique person on the face of the earth—he is the Word that was spoken, through whom the world was made, initiating life, light, justice, deliverance, and joy. As we study this book, this will be the basis:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth through the Word who existed, who was with God and who was God. Nothing was made without Him. He brings light and darkness cannot overcome it.

Jesus is not just your ordinary human being. He is not one among the many gods of the pagans. He is not simply a counselor or boss or brother or pastor or president or authority. Jesus is King of kings. He is God descended, moving into this world so that we can see God and have life and light and justice and deliverance and Joy.

When you have Jesus in your life you have access to just that. Have you made Jesus small? Or do you see Jesus for who He is? Can we let Jesus be who He is in our lives in 2018?

Perhaps you need an entire new start. If you are willing, let's start by asking Jesus a few questions:

1. Where do you want to shine light in my life, Jesus?
2. What is dark in me that I need to give you right now?

Something will come to your mind. Trust that the Spirit of God is bringing that to your mind so you can begin to experience deliverance in that one area. Perhaps you need help with forgiving others, or you need self-discipline for not only spiritual things, but simple things, like getting up in the morning or being consistent in your workouts or taking care of your home and possessions, or budgeting your money. God cares about these things, as well as your spiritual growth.

Ask God each morning to help you notice Jesus, throughout the day. That will move you more and more into the light and away from darkness, out of chaos and into life, and out of insecurity and into Joy.

Begin 2018 by looking for Jesus. You will find real help. Live in the light and connect with God. AMEN

² See the movie "The Darkest Hour" which is about Winston Churchill's leadership during the evacuation of Dunkirk.

³ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, est. date: 175-185 A.D., ref. 3.1.2.

⁴ Translation from the *Greek-English New Testament* by Nestle-Aland, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1981).

