

I don't know about you, but I find today's gospel strangely placed.

We've enjoyed the narrative accounts of Jesus' nativity and the fascinating events leading up to the beautiful scene in the manger and then from out of the blue it seems we are broadsided with a drastic change of voice. Now, don't get me wrong, when it comes to lyrical beauty, you're hard-pressed to find an introduction to a gospel, or any other book in the bible for that matter that rivals the profound opening of John's gospel. It's just, with everyone rushing to put christmas in the books, baby Jesus in the attic, and returning that which does not suit us, it'd be nice to have a little bit more time to bask in His precious presence there in the manger.

It may just be me but I definitely need more time this year to sit with the wonder and amazement of Mary and Joseph. Considering this is our last "first Christmas" to celebrate as a family maybe I'm a little too sentimental. Oh well, I guess you can't win them all. While John doesn't paint us the Thomas Kinkade or Norman Rockwell Christmas scene we cherish this time of year, he does give us something more lasting and more difficult to manipulate into retail bottom lines and holiday whiplash.

Anyways, John places before us his vision of discipleship from the very start of his Gospel. In his intro and exploration of the very Word of God, John makes it abundantly clear that from the very beginning, Jesus has been present in the life and story of God and His people. Here Jesus is the very embodiment of God's breaking in and reaching out to human history. John is reminding us that life itself is birthed through words, in witness, chiefly in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ.

From the very beginning of creation, God spoke, "Let there be light." The light that shines in the darkness is reflected through and focused by the Son. The next figure we see is John the Baptist, a witness and testament to the light, and I would argue the perfect example of discipleship. He cried out in anticipation of the one who would come, the One he wasn't worthy to untie the thong of His sandal. He constantly fielded questions as to who he was, skirting every opportunity to garner praise and acclaim for himself. His was a ministry of deference, even as people flocked to him. And this is why, I think, he plays such a prominent role in the early going of John's gospel.

John was a witness. His sole purpose was to prepare the way for the Messiah, to point Him out. He drew a crowd and his own followers because

of the exciting promise he spoke of. It was hard not to get wrapped up in the excitement, I'm sure. Yet the one coming after him was going to do something new, something different. The one coming after him was bringing grace upon grace into the impossibility of the human experience. The one coming after him was coming to pour himself out so we may once more see and experience the Love that God intended for all his children.

Much is made about Jesus being poured out, it's kind of what the incarnation is all about. I think though that we don't give enough thought to where he is being poured! This isn't pouring a sip out for lost friends. This isn't pouring out the dregs so the next one can be opened. This fundamental life-giving experience open to all who receive him offers us new life, a new name, a new family. Where am I going with this? Let me tell you. Actually, I'll let Phillip Brooks tell you.

How silently, how silently,  
The wondrous Gift is giv'n!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
The blessings of His heaven.  
No ear may hear His coming,  
But in this world of sin,  
Where meek souls will receive Him still,  
The dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem,  
Descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sins and enter in,  
Be born to us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels

The great glad tidings tell:  
Oh, come to us, abide with us,  
Our Lord Emmanuel!

You may recognize the third and fourth verses of "O Little Town of Bethlehem," one of my favorites. John the Baptist deferred to Jesus Christ. His testimony was not about himself, it was about the one to come. When we make room in our hearts, in our lives, for the wholeness and goodness of God's love manifest in Jesus so too will we be able to testify to the one who is coming. The more we open ourselves to Jesus dwelling in the person looking back at you in the mirror, the sooner we see Him dwelling in our neighbor. As Jesus pours himself out we must be open, and willing to welcome his presence with humble hearts and meek souls to enjoy the endless draught of God's unyielding love. In doing so, we become a new creation. In doing so, we bear witness in word and deed to the miraculous events of this Christmas season. In doing so, we reclaim the the mantle of John and all the disciples who point the way to the Son of God who came down offering the gift of God's pure love.

Abide with us, God with us and with open hearts may we continue to prove a worthy dwelling place for you, O Lord.