

ONE WAY IN AND OUT

Jesus is good at his job. Today we hear that Jesus is so good at his job that no matter how long it might be before the last day arrives, Jesus will not lose track of us in the meantime. On the last day, our reading from John says, Jesus will be there to raise us up unto eternal life no matter the time elapsed. But is this ultimately Jesus' job; to care for us through all the twists and turns of God's plan so that he might be there to raise us up at the last?

This certainly wouldn't be a bad job description for Jesus, but it also might be a little too limiting. Throughout his gospel, John applies many, many metaphors and descriptions to Jesus. Today, Jesus is the Bread of Life that sustains us eternally. Previously, he's been the very Word of God, the giver of grace upon grace, the Son who reveals the Father's heart, the best wine ever, the new Temple, the replacement for Moses' bronze serpent on a pole, living water, the One whose food is doing the will of God, and the end time Judge appointed by God the Father. And this is all with fifteen chapters still to go. All the metaphors, all the descriptions, can get a little overwhelming in no time at all and this may be the point to some degree. It's possible that John keeps piling on the metaphors and the descriptions because he wants Jesus to come off as one of a kind; someone we would never dream of making our peer or our equal. But like any good evangelist, John doesn't just want to worship Jesus in all of his majesty and magnificence. He also wants to communicate and to connect with his audience. He wants his audience to know what Jesus' job is and that Jesus is good at it. To this end, I'm happy to report that John lays down enough of a trail that we can follow it and make sense of all the places he takes us.

One good place to look for this trail is in what's come to be known as the prologue to John's gospel. Taking up the first eighteen verses of his work, the prologue to John's gospel is itself soaring and poetic. Right out of the gate, John writes, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." Such talk probably helps to explain why John's gospel has long been called the most spiritual gospel. John soars and flies with his language. But as much as the prologue to John's gospel is no exception to this rule, the prologue doesn't just tell us we should buckle up for what's going to be quite a roller coaster ride. It also lays down much of the trail we'll need to follow if all the forthcoming dots are to be connected.

Key for our purposes today is John's assertion in his prologue that all things came into being through Jesus. According to John, Jesus is a Creator of the capital C variety. If it had to be, I suppose this could be Jesus' job—to create. But thankfully, John also goes a little farther than this in his prologue. While hailing Jesus' identity as a Creator of the capital C variety, he also says Jesus specializes in the creation of a life that has been and continues to be the light of all people. When you get down to it, this is Jesus' job. This is the job at which Jesus excels. He's very, very good at being or creating the light that gets us through our present darkness and on into the Kingdom of God where the book of Revelation tells us there shall be endless light. This is Jesus' job. Jesus' job is to be or to create the light that gets us out of the darkness; both the darkness of our present and the darkness of our future apart from the grace of God.

Start with the darkness of our present. Describing our present as dark can be hard for us to stomach and rightfully so to some degree. I think of two, twin sisters, I once baptized as one was preparing to be married. As we were preparing for their baptism, the two sisters had some trouble with how dark the Church's description of human beings and life in general can be. They reckoned, if everything's so dark, if everything's so hopeless, if we're in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves, then why bother! Even before they became mothers, something which eventually happened in one case I know, here were two young women who already had a sense of how beautiful life can be; of how euphoric life can be; of how wonderful falling in love, giving birth, and creating positive change can be. And you know, in spite of all of his talk about darkness, John knows this too. In one of the Bible's most well-known verses, John says God so loved the world, so loved the world, that he gave his only Son Jesus to die for it. This passionate, self-sacrificing love for all of creation certainly adds nuance to all of John's talk about darkness. I think we might say that all of John's talk about darkness is meant to say that God loves the sinner and loathes the sin; knowing sin to be a destructive force in our present and lethal whereas eternity is concerned. But be this as it may, this doesn't change the fact that our present is dark sometimes.

One of the first times life on this side of the hereafter got dark for me was when a kid named Tim Denny knocked me out cold in the fifth grade. One second I could see trees of green and skies of blue and the colors of the rainbow like Louis Armstrong. The next second, with a fist pummeling into my jaw, everything went dark and I fell to the ground in a heap. It's what can happen in our present. Life can knock us out. Life can blind and bewilder us. Life can leave us weaving and wobbling like a punch-drunk boxer. But Jesus, who's so good at his job, administers the smelling salts we need. He brings light and focus back to our eyes. Being and creating the light we need he turns on the light switch so we might stop bumping into the walls at night and tripping over ourselves and our present. Our reading from Ephesians calls this Jesus helping us make the most of the time we have until the last day. Our reading from 1st Kings calls this Jesus giving us the wisdom to be who God would have us be in real time and space. Our reading from John calls this Jesus giving us the food and the drink we need to recover our strength and to see straight and clear again. Whatever we may call it, this is a big part of Jesus' job. Through the Holy Spirit we receive at baptism, through prayer, through the word of God in all of its forms, through holy communion, and through fellowship with other Christians, Jesus is the light or creates the light we need to get us through our present when it gets dark. But before we get to the endless light to be experienced in the Kingdom of God, there's another darkness Jesus has to handle for us. It's the darkness of death.

Jesus himself experienced this thick, seemingly endless darkness on Good Friday. First, there was the suffering that all too often precedes death. Then there was the darkness of death itself. But after the darkness of death, there also came the light of Easter Sunday. Long before Jim Morrison and the Doors sang of it, Jesus broke on through to the other side. On Easter Sunday, he made it all the way through what we once thought was the thick and endless darkness of death so he might prepare a place for us in the Kingdom of God where the light of God shall shine so bright and strong that it will render the sun obsolete according to the book of Revelation. To date, Jesus is the only one who has ever done this. And in fact,

other than God the Father and God the Son, he's the only one who ever can do it. This is why Jesus says today that we have no life in us apart from him. Without Jesus, the darkness of death will win, but it also doesn't have to be this way. Jesus is very, very good at his job. Jesus is the light or creates the light that gets us in and out of our present darkness, where and when it exists, and then well beyond the darkness of death forever. Jesus first becomes this light for us on the day of our baptism and remains the same light for us unto eternity as long as we have the Holy Spirit's gift of faith. It's why these weekly gatherings are so important. Without them, baptism's light still shines, but the Holy Spirit's gift of faith fades and may even be quenched; which is something we definitely don't want to happen. And so, let's keep at it with one another, continuing to gather as we are today, until through the ongoing ministrations of the Holy Spirit Jesus gets us in and out of what can be our present darkness and then well beyond the darkness of death forever and ever and ever. Amen!