

Going Toward God  
A sermon by David Roquemore  
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First Presbyterian Church, Newton, NC

John 1:1-4

Today we begin a series on the Gospel of John. There is much to be gleaned from this gospel, much we can learn. It begins to let us see things, to clue us in on things that we otherwise might never know. It is a great gospel.

Oh, I know, it is different from the other three. To which I answer, “so?” What is the issue? What is the problem? There is nothing unorthodox or wrong with a different take on who Jesus is, as long as it stays within the boundaries of what we know to be true. In other words, it is different, but not so different that it strays from the truth. The other three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are known as the Synoptic gospels, because they have the same vision, they present the same picture of Jesus. They are linked historically, Matthew and Luke each apparently using Mark as a source. John is a different animal altogether.

John starts off with this magnificent poem, this hymn to the Logos, the Word. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” There are several things going on with this. First there is the concept of the Logos, the rational means by which God created the world. This is usually understood to mean the Second Person of the Trinity as well. The Son. The Father begot the Son, the Logos, the Word.

Now often we think of it this way. The Father begot the Son, which is a kind of code for, “in a timeless era before time began” the Father did something and the Son came to be. Only, the Son is eternal with the Father. So “begot” is a sort of weasel word for whatever caused this relationship to exist. At any rate, there is Father and Son. And the Son at some point deigns to be humiliated, and be born of woman, and comes to exist as Jesus, the son of Mary. And so the life of Jesus is an “episode” in the ongoing eternal life of the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity. And thus it is not entirely accurate to talk about Jesus before the birth.

That is how we often think, but look again at this verse. In the beginning was the Word. Who is the Word? The Word is Jesus Christ. All the ancient church writers attest to this. The universal opinion of the Church is that this refers to Jesus Christ. So then we get, “In the beginning was Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ was with God, and Jesus Christ was God.”

It gets better! The verb we translate as “was” is an imperfect, which in certain circumstances could also be “is.” This is one of those circumstances. So we get “In the beginning is Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ is with God, and Jesus Christ is God.”

The only words we haven’t looked at are “in the beginning” and “with”. For In the beginning, it isn’t the temporal beginning that is referred to, exactly. It isn’t “At the start, ...” but more like, “First of all, ....” Jesus Christ comes first in the pecking order, in the hierarchy of all things, in the plan of God.

What does this mean for you in your everyday life? You might say, nothing! But it does. Let's think. Many of the evangelicals – read that as Protestants – in our world do not agree with the statement, “Jesus Christ is God.” I mentioned that a couple of weeks ago. But here we see that Jesus Christ is precisely God. He isn't God the Father, but he is God the Son. What's the difference? The Father begets the Son, and the Son is begotten by the Father. The difference is in the relationship, but only that. These then are different properties of the Godhead, of the Trinity. But in all things the Son is equal to the Father. They are the same.

So when we say we have a relationship with Jesus Christ, we mean to say that we are in communion with him, we participate in his life, and he is fully God; therefore we participate in the life of God! Jesus is not some come-along-lately second in command, some vice-president, whose job is to be quiet and stand to the side.

A lot of vice-presidents act like Calvin Coolidge's guest. The guest saw Coolidge pour some milk into a saucer. Not wanting to offend, the guest poured some milk into his saucer, too, only to have Coolidge eye him weirdly as the President lowered his saucer to the floor for his pet cat.

No, he is not like that guest. Jesus is fully God, working out the plan of God.

Now the word, “with”, in these sentences is the Greek word, *pros*, not *meta*. So what, you ask? Well, *pros* means something like “going towards,” or even, “to.” So the Word, Jesus Christ, is going towards God, and is God. Christ Jesus comes into this world, incarnate of the Father, and brings his work into the world, to return to God, to go back to God, and to take us with him. And so we see that his incarnation, his life in this world, is a journey. And he takes us on that journey.

So we are on a journey with Jesus Christ, toward God the Father, with whom Jesus shares his nature. He takes us with him, by grace, so that we can share what he is by nature.

He calls us to the communion table, where we partake of his body and blood. You can think of this symbolically, or sacramentally. But remember what Flannery O'Connor, said, good Catholic as she was, “if it is only a symbol, then to heck with it!” However you understand it, we take something mysterious in this meal. Jesus Christ comes and meets us there, feeding us, making us one with him, drawing us into communion with him. As we come out of this meal, we understand more and more deeply what it means to be with him, to commune with him.

Let us gather at His table!

Thanks be to God. Amen.