

“Wrapping Around Our Foundation”

John 1:1-14

January 5, 2020



God is our rock, the Foundation of all life, the unending, unconditional Love of all we are and all we do as God’s faithful people. The Church is Christ’s Word in the World. The Word wraps around the Foundation, and God’s Holy Spirit gives us heart and voice and energy to be the Foundation’s trumpeters. Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church in John’s Gospel, the 1st Chapter, beginning with the 1st verse:

The Word was first,
the Word present to God,
 God present to the Word.
The Word was God,
 in readiness for God from day one.

Everything was created through him;
 nothing—not one thing!—
 came into being without him.
What came into existence was Life,
 and the Life was Light to live by.

The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness;
the darkness couldn't put it out.

There once was a man, his name John, sent by God to point out the way to the Life-Light. He came to show everyone where to look, who to believe in. John was not himself the Light; he was there to show the way to the Light.

The Life-Light was the real thing:
Every person entering Life
he brings into Light.
He was in the world,
the world was there through him,
and yet the world didn't even notice.
He came to his own people,
but they didn't want him.
But whoever did want him,
who believed he was who he claimed
and would do what he said,
He made to be their true selves,
their child-of-God selves.
These are the God-begotten,
not blood-begotten,
not flesh-begotten,
not sex-begotten.

The Word became flesh and blood,
and moved into the neighborhood.
We saw the glory with our own eyes,
the one-of-a-kind glory,
like Father, like Son,
Generous inside and out,
true from start to finish.

As we enter a new year, yea a new decade, we look at what is behind us before Spirit gives us permission to forge our pathway to what is ahead. We start with John 1, because he starts with the Word, the beginning of all things foundational to our faith. Difficult though he is to read, hear, and understand, if we allow ourselves room to be non-linear and

more mystical around him, if we can receive John with a “lightness that seems too perfect for this world,” he becomes less of a theologian and more of a poet, and we become less of a religious body and more of a spiritual beating heart. The invitation is to sit in the confusion and the wordiness while John converses with our inner voice.

Author and educator Alexander John Shaia recently wrote a book I am reading, *Heart and Mind: The Four Gospel Journey for Radical Transformation*. He seeks to re-enliven the mystical side of Jesus in the historical contexts of the four Gospel writers. I found this introductory statement useful for answering why we bother, week after week, studying passages from the Bible, when it is old, when it is in places culturally locked, and when it is used by so many as a weapon against others rather than an instrument of liberation for all. He writes: “We need treasured guides that have stood the test of centuries, and are also astute enough in the present moment to truly provide worthy counsel for today’s crises and tomorrow’s unexpected dilemmas.”(5)

I think this is a true statement. We wrap our hopes and dreams, fears and anxieties around our rock-solid foundation, and in so doing, we live out the Christian life, now more than 20 centuries in the making.

In Mark and in Matthew, we are immediately taken to Jesus -In-Action. Jesus, an adult man, springs into Mark’s Gospel, thrust out into the wilderness to take on the devil. After forty days and nights being tested, he hits the streets of the city in Galilee, preaching the Good News to the people: “Times up! He proclaims, “God’s kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the Message!” The rocket ship has launched and off it goes.

Matthew’s Gospel right up front provides his Judaic context so there is no doubt from which voice and experience he writes. And then he, too,

gets right into the story of the birth of the Christ child, determined to prove to his world and culture that the long-awaited Messiah has come.

In contrast, John invites us not into a rocket launcher, but more like into a livingroom rocker. Setting the stage, identifying the Word as life's foundation, opening his theology up to observation and contemplation, this is John, the outsider and mystic of the end of the first century. And this is where we land in the Lectionary for the first Sunday of the new year of the new decade.

Our new digital church sign serves as an apt metaphor for this concept. In 2004, faithful church member, Mary Ellen Mellor, passed away. She left the church a \$5000 gift, and from that gift, church leaders Doug Stephenson and Tom Lewis caused a piece of Lyons sandstone to be etched with the church's name and placed on a pedestal they constructed for that purpose. The church subsequently changed its name to Hilltop United Church of Christ, and then in 2013 when the church voted to change its name once again, to UCC Parker Hilltop, the sign was covered over with our new church name and information. All through these changes in church identity, the foundation and sandstone remained in place as an anchor.

Jean Sherer researched this history and concluded to us recently:

That very sign will provide stability for the new digital sign erected in 2019. The digital sign has the capacity to show pictures, colors, posts of UCCPH's activities, announcements and other exciting possibilities.

We wrap our future church hopes and dreams around the solid foundation of our colorful and faithful history. The old will provide stability for the new—a buffer against the winds of time still to blow. The new sign carries on the traditions of the old as it reaches out into a yet unforeseen, but optimistic future, beckoning those who need the Good News and loving community we have to offer.

It is good, therefore, to pause and reflect on this first Sunday of 2020. Responding to John’s invitation, we sit a while and revel in the vastness that is God and in the timelessness that is our time here on earth multiplied beyond our capacity to even imagine. We sit a while and consider the Word that is the Christ we know in story and will never fully know in mystery.

I asked you to think through your past year, decade, life, or maybe just yesterday, and play with me today the More and Less Game. Some of you may be fully prepared, having read the Thursday email and dutifully prepared your homework! Some of you may be hearing about this exercise for the first time. So, here’s how it will go, if you choose to play along:

I am going to ask Peggy to play something contemplative for a minute or two, during which you will write down on your bulletin or index card in front of you up to three things you wish More of for 2020. These could be resolutions that you want to embody, like eating More rocky road ice cream, or wishes you have for your life, like driving More mountain roads, or plans for more adventure, like writing More on your Great American Novel you started to pen years ago.

Then you will do the same for up to three things you wish Less of in 2020, such as Less time worrying about your portfolio, Less days where you

feel you are unworthy of God's love, or Less conflict in our country. You get the idea?

A cautionary note: you will be sharing one of these with your pew neighbor, so only write what you are willing to share and what supports a healthy ministry relationship in this church. I think you know what I mean about what is fine and what may be off-limits TMI kinds of disclosure!

Silence and then sharing.

And then community sharing of your own writing.

It is our tendency as humans and humans in community to make our plans and forge ahead. There is so much we can do here as a church in the visible future and up ahead beyond the curve in the road. It is exciting, as Jean said, to think of all the possibilities! But John, today's sage, today's Gospel writer, encourages us to first be in prayer, to first be in quiet, to celebrate first our relationship with God and to think about what God's Word has meant and still *could* mean for our lives.

Where have we missed this mark in the past year? What opportunities to know and love God and Jesus and Spirit have passed us by? What has been left undone?

And conversely, where have we celebrated God in our lives over this past 12 months? Where have we found that Advent Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love that we have proclaimed? How do we get more of *that* stuff in our lives and how do we bring others along into relationship with the Good News of our unconditional love and acceptance?

Our sign can now boldly and proudly state for the hungry world what we know already feeds us—that we are welcome here, just as we are, and we are good enough, just as we are: good enough for God, and good enough for each other. It is truly a good New Year when we can wish into being

More goodwill, More love and compassion, and More healing for our collective brokenness. It is truly a good New Decade when we can wish into being Less consumerism, Less eco-waste, Less hatred and divisiveness, and Less despair of the future.

We are God's heart and mind for radical spiritual transformation in the world. Let us wrap our new LED-powered energy around our steady, rock-solid foundation as we go boldly forward into the unknown, glorious future God has in store for us!

May It Be So, more....or less.

donations gratefully accepted:

<https://www.uccparkerhilltop.org/giving/>

UCC Parker Hilltop

10926 E. Democrat Rd.

Parker, CO 80134