

## Longing to be with God

### Sermon for Epiphany Sunday

Sermon Text: John 1:15-18



<sup>15</sup> (John bore witness about Him, and cried out, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because He was before me.’”) <sup>16</sup> For from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, He has made Him known.

John the Baptist did his absolute best! He wanted to do God’s Will. That’s why he not only read the Laws of Moses but also tried to fulfill them. And yet he saw corruption everywhere – both in himself and with other people. Corruption and hypocrisy disgusted him. Perhaps that’s why he went into the desert so that he could free himself from these things. But you could also hear his clear voice from the desert. That’s why many followed him to the desert and there they could hear the same message again and again: “Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is near!” But John’s sermon didn’t end with that. Like no one else, John could see that the reason for the hypocrisy had something to do with the very law he was preaching to the people. With prophetic eyes, he constantly observed how people faked a pious life or kept the laws only in their public life. But in their private life, the people stayed far away from God! Because people couldn’t follow the laws, the law itself was abused to look good in front of others because keeping the laws publicly was easy to fake. But God could look into people’s hearts and that’s why John knew that something new must come. The law could no longer help because people were evil. Everything must become new. And this new thing could be summarized with a name: “Jesus Christ.” The more John understood that his whole mission would culminate in this Jesus, the more he understood that he really only came to announce this Jesus. This Jesus who was before him and would come after him. In John’s Gospel, the apostle John talks about this John the Baptist and he continues where John the Baptist stopped: he announces Jesus. He does that right away in the first verses of the Gospel according to John because the name of Jesus first appears in these words. It is basically the introduction of Jesus Christ. Today, we all bear the name of Jesus Christ. We are baptized in His name and that’s why we are named after Him. Just as He is called Christ, we are now Christians! But not just our name comes from Jesus. Our identity also comes from Him. That’s why the first word that’s spoken over our newborn children is Christ. That happens when we baptize our children. The name of Jesus Christ is also the last word of hope we speak to the dying. And it is likewise the first word that we hear when we get to heaven. Jesus Christ! “Jesus Christ, who are you and who are you to me?” the apostle John explains in his introduction who Jesus is and says:

All the fullness of **God** is in Jesus

All the fullness of our God is made **incarnate** in Jesus.

All the fullness of our God is made incarnate in Jesus **for us!**

**So God is made incarnate for us in Jesus Christ!**

And now we want to look at this in more detail:

1. **All the fullness of our God is in Jesus.** If I watch my life play like a movie before me, then I know one thing with absolute certainty – and that’s that I know nothing about God. And just as I don’t know anything about God, I also can’t do anything to get to God. That’s impossible. God is too big and too much that I can’t grasp Him with my little life. I also encounter this same idea constantly in your Persian poems. For example, Ghazal 1 of Hafez:

O Saqi, pass around and offer the cup: For love seemed easy at first, but then came difficulties. Longing for the sweet scent the morning wind unlocks from the locks of her forehead

Short explanation of the poem: (the cup refers to heavenly secrets. Love is seen as mystical by Hafez and sometimes refers to the relationship between God and people. Morning wind is the bearer of God’s secrets. The locks of the forehead are a reference to the secrets of God that are unclear to people.)

Martin Luther also acknowledged this when he says: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him.” Together with Hafez, Martin Luther, and John the Baptist, we must declare our weakness, even when we can still achieve so much in life. We can’t understand anything about God, nor can we bring anything before Him. So, we stand before God with empty hands and yet we don’t remain standing there hopelessly. We don’t remain hopeless because there is One in whom all the fullness of God is present. That is Jesus. And what a miracle – Jesus comes to us! The fullness of God comes to us. He, who no one can grasp with his thoughts, becomes human!

2. And what is amazing is that Jesus is never far away from us but becomes incarnate. He **became a person**, like us. He was brought up by Mary and Joseph. John and the other disciples could see Him and talk with Him. And because they saw Him, they could see who God is. Jesus revealed God through His Word and through His deeds. And that’s why John the Baptist ultimately says: “It is He! God is present in Him.” All our hopeless attempts to find God end in Jesus Christ. In Jesus, I realize that God is also with me, even when the path to God seems so incredibly far away, even when I can’t understand God with my mind or win Him over with laws. In Jesus, I realize that I must no longer seek God. That’s because God found me. God comes to my life! I realize that God speaks with me – He still does that today through His Word. I am even so closely connected to Him that I can belong to His family. When I am baptized, I become baptized into His family, I receive His Name, and I belong to Him. I am a Christian.
3. And when I belong to Christ, I suddenly realize what grace means. I realize that Jesus didn’t just come to earth, rather He came to earth **for me!** I can experience in my life that He lives in me. I can be free! That’s why it’s no longer important what I look like to others or what they think of me. I also become free of my conscience and my fears. I may also breathe a sigh of relief and be free from my many problems! I can speak with God! And that’s not because I am such a good person or because I achieved something. I receive grace just because Jesus came. I realize that grace is not just a thing or a feeling, but a person. Jesus is grace! And as I realize that, I can also pass this Jesus on to others – even in places where people are distraught or make mistakes. I can say to them: Jesus came for people just like you. Nothing and no one can prevent you from becoming, being, and remaining a Christian – and it’s all because of Jesus! Amen.