



Second Sunday of Christmas, Year A

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Deacon for Baptized Living

Gospel Text – John 1:[1-9] 10-18

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[¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.]

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ") ¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

SERMON TEXT:

Merry Christmas! No, I am not confused. Today is the eleventh day of Christmas. It's almost Epiphany. And that means, by my calculations, we are coming to an end of the Season of All the Plans.

Did *you* have a plan to get through Christmas this year? Did you make lists? Did you check them twice, like a certain famous Christmas figure? Even if you are not the planning type, you might need a plan to get through a busy season like Christmas.

And then, before we can stop and breathe a little, the year turns, and it's time for New Year's resolutions. We are totally going to be the people we always meant to be this year! Okay, maybe it's an aspiration more than a plan, but we really mean it! Yeah. Right.

And here comes Paul, talking about *God's* plans. It's like he's mocking us.

We have a tendency to talk about God's plan as if the persons of the Holy Trinity were a trio of cosmic micromanagers, planning our lives on some everlasting, invisible checklist. And there can be *some* shallow comfort in platitudes like "everything happens for a reason," and "God has a plan," as if these glib words explain all terrible things.

Imagine God going down the checklist: "Oh, now it's time to make something awful happen to Susan, so that she can learn a lesson. It's all part of my plan!" Really?!

So, for today, in the midst of our obsessive plans, and fears, and failures, and doubts, here is what Paul actually writes: "...[God] has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that was set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."¹

This is not Christmas list or performance improvement stuff, here, this is "the mystery of God's will," "set forth in [Jesus]," and "a plan for the fullness of time." It is about all things in heaven and on earth. It's about gathering, not blaming. It's about God's work, not ours.

Jesus – the Word – "was in the world, and the world came into being through him..." That's beautiful language, but it's also God's

¹ Ephesians 1:9-10, NRSVUE

plan: Jesus, who became the stuff of life and lived among us. Jesus, who destined us for adoption as God's own children. In him, we are each, in our baptism, marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit. In him, we receive grace and truth. In him, God's plan is more amazing – and a whole lot bigger – than a checklist of dos and don'ts, or a pre-recorded path for our lives.

This plan does not leave us out, it invites us in. In response to our baptism, we have promises to keep. Not because God needs those promises, but because we do. Remember the words from the Affirmation of Baptism service: We promise to live among God's faithful people, to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper, to proclaim the good news of Christ in word and deed, to serve all people following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

Hey, now we can make a plan! We can even check some items off the list.

- "Live among God's faithful people." Oh, look, here we are! Check.
- "Hear the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper." Are we having communion this week? Okay, check that sometimes.
- "Proclaim the good news..." Hey, I'm doing that right now. Check.
- "Serve all people, following the example of Jesus." Um, does it have to be *all* people, really?

- "Strive for justice and peace in all the earth." What does that even mean?

Okay, what if we make the tasks even smaller?

"Pray before dinner."

"Donate to the food pantry."

"Mean to read the Bible more, but don't actually."

Those are all good things, right? (Well, maybe actually reading the Bible would be better, but you can't have everything.)

Tempting as that all is, it's not really how baptism works. A baptized life is not a series of tasks to add to your to do list, it's something simpler. And bigger, too.

Following Jesus, living into our lives as baptized members of the body of Christ is *who we are*. We are God's relatives. We are marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit. We receive an inheritance, grace upon grace. Baptized living is just –"just"– living like that is real. It is not a list of things to add (and probably never do), but a lens through which we encounter the whole world.

I don't need to add "serve all people," I serve the people in front of me. I don't add "hear the word of God," I fold scripture into my life. Proclaiming the good news? Now, that can take work, but if we live

like there is good news, some of that work is already done. It happens naturally, a little every day.

We know that God's ways are not our ways. God's plans are not our plans. If God does keep a great cosmic checklist, its timeline and its parameters look like nothing we can imagine. But we do know that the most important thing has already been done.

"Save all people." Check. Jesus did it!

And you know what else? God didn't ever have to put "love everyone" on God's list because God is love and God loves you just as you are no matter how many New Year's resolutions you have failed at, or baptismal promises you have forgotten, or mistakes you have made. That's the heart of God's plan, right here.

My challenge to all of us in this new year is to live that love, and look for the in-breaking of *that* plan. By all means, keep yours lists, your plans, your resolutions if that works for you, but let God's love and God's amazing plan – already begun in Christ, not yet completed but absolutely going to be – enclose your whole life. Live in response to that love, not in guilt or shame or shoulds or should'ves. Make a few reminders if that helps.

"I am loved." Check.

"I am baptized." Check. (And if you are not, you can be.)

"I am following Jesus." In love, we can do that, too.

Thanks be to God. *Amen.*

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