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Lesson: John 1:1-18

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<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

<sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. <sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>9</sup>The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup>He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup>But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup>who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. <sup>14</sup>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.

<sup>15</sup>(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.'") <sup>16</sup>From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup>The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

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I am of the belief that there should be the warning label posted at the beginning of John's gospel: "Prepare to have your mind blown." Today's lesson is called The Prologue to John's gospel, and it is always worth our attempts to have a fresh reading of it, as if hearing it for the first time. John's gospel begins by planting itself in the bedrock of the ancient Jewish premise that God is not one being among similar beings. "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people." God cannot be lumped together with all other things and then picked out as the supreme one. Rather, when we describe God as a being, it is with an understanding that God is in a class above all others. Yet, the premise goes even further than that: God is the source from which everything else derives their being. God is the source, the ground, the archetype of all other beings.

There was an early Christian theologian who said, "God is the being beyond all being." The use of "beyond" here is meant as both 'the source of' as well as 'outside the limits.' That is a pretty deep thought by itself, but there is more: in both instances when this theologian used the word "being," the word used is actually a verb, not a noun. Hear it again that way, with BE-ing as an action: "God is the BE-ing beyond all BE-ing." The point is that God is the eternal transpiring that is the source for the ongoing transpiring of everything else.

It is easy to think that God created the universe once and has ever since dabbled in it here or there ever since. But the truth of our faith is that God is continuing to create at the cosmic level and the quantum level. God is continuing to create you... and me... each and every day. The essence of our BE-ing is ever-finding its continuance in God's BE-ing. This lines up nicely with what is revealed in that

scene in Exodus when Moses asks God for God's name, and God responds, "I AM." The response implies an ongoing action, however, kind of like "I AM-ing." That's a surface level translation, truth be told, and scholars say it's impossible to peg down an exact translation. However, what really blows my mind about the name is that there isn't consensus on how the name is pronounced, if it can even be pronounced. Some say the name is the unpronounceable sound made when we inhale and then exhale:

*YH...WH...                      YH...WH...*

It's as if every breath we take is dependent upon God's BE-ing. It's as if God is always as close to us as our own breath.

I have been pondering the significance of that lately. If the name of God is as close to us as our breath -- *YH...WH...* -- how do we understand that in light of a virus that is stripping so many from their breath? Of course nothing can separate us from God, especially not a disease. So please don't assume that anyone is more or less deserving of breath or of God's presence. My point is that as comforting as I find the thought of God being as close as my own breath, during this pandemic I am finding more comfort in knowing that God is even closer than our breath. God has taken on flesh like our own and willingly submitted to a cross that would strip the breath away from God. When the day comes that our breath is stripped away, even God has experienced the same, and God can bring life out of such loss.

"No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." That is what we celebrate at Christmas. The one who was, who is, and who is to come, freely chooses to dwell with us. The BE-ing that is the source of all BE-ing seeks to draw so close to us, and taking on

flesh is the only way to do it. The BE-ing beyond all BE-ing... became one of us. God incarnate.

When we ponder the child in the manger, we ask “What child is this?” This child is God incarnate. The BE-ing beyond all BE-ing... given to us. The life that fills our every breath... born among us. *But why? Why does God go to this extent? To be born in lowly circumstances? Isn't our breath close enough?* We might think it is. But God wants to be closer to us than even our breath. God takes on flesh because it is the only way to truly show us the depth of God's love. Only an incarnate God who willingly bears a cross is able to show us and this world the true measure of God's love. It is only through the incarnation that God's desire to be close to us is satisfied. Because through the incarnation, God is closer to us than we are to ourselves.

“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. From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”

Thanks be to God. Amen.