

Christmas Day, 2020. John 1.

There are a million ways to tell a love story. We might start with how we met, or where each of us came from, or the most dramatic moment in a long relationship. My love stories might change in the telling from day to day and listener to listener and mood to mood. I wouldn't think, probably, to begin like John does: before creation, in some indefinable beginning.

It can throw us off from what is going on here. We get lost in the metaphysical poetry, the dance between Word and God that led to all things coming into being, the play between light and darkness, the world as unwilling host to its creator. All of that is right and mesmerizingly beautiful. But this morning I want us to remember that the gospel, told by John or anyone else, is a love story. I wouldn't change a word of John's introduction, but if I could, I would just add one line: and all of this because of God's love for us. Or even, sticking within this same gospel, appending that most familiar verse, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son."

John's cosmic prologue clarifies the stakes. This love story is not just a meet-cute or an odd couple from any of a thousand Hallmark Christmas movies we may have used to drug ourselves this month (no judgment here!). It is a story of God, so desperate with pure love for us that no extremity of self-sacrifice is beyond the pale. The one who made the world will come into the world, unknown, unheralded, and unwelcome, to be with us when we could not find our way to them.

I wonder if this year, as bruised and battered as we all are, this is what we need to hear most today. You are loved. In fact, the most fundamental, the truest thing about you, is that you are loved by God. Y'all, God knows that you cuss too much, that you lose your patience, that you judge your cousin for all kinds of uncharitable reasons. God knows that you're a mess. *And* you are the reason that the Word became flesh. You are the one that God loved so much that the Word came to dwell with us as one of us, with all the indignities that involves. The first and last thing about you and about me and about our enemies is God's cosmos-splitting love for us.

I know that it doesn't always feel like it, and maybe especially not now, when we're so covered by the crust and grime of this horrible year. But today assures us that the light of God's love has come into the world and is shining in the night of our lives—and the night will not overcome it. The love of God 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. Amen.