

December 26th 2021

Christmas 1st Sunday; Year C

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Psalm 147: 13-21

John 1: 1-18

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In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. 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. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

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

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

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. (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.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 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.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I have mint growing in my garden. It arrived when a friend dug up iris in her garden and gave some to me. Nothing is better when a friend says goodbye, then to have a bit of their garden stay with you. Now when her flowers bloom, I think of my friend, now living faraway, but still present here in her flowers.

My friend had mint in her garden, and in that overly friendly way of mint, it decided to come along for the ride, truly not even visible when I replanted the iris, but surprise! As the iris settled in, up popped the mint, with vigor.

I do not mind the mint; I enjoy the sharp scent of it when I pull a weed. Even in the cold of winter, the hardy mint, fragrant and, persistent.

However, gardeners know you must keep an eye on mint, because it is persistent, no, really it is aggressive, putting down roots that tunnel horizontally in the garden allowing new mint, more and more mint to pop up all over your garden, pushing other plants out of the way, even strangling more delicate plantings.

On this first Sunday after Christmas, just a day after Christmas, our readings are filled with comfort and light and call.

Our collect lavishes light on us, and calls us to live lives that offers God's light to others:

“Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives....”

Our gospel passage from the opening of John carries those most comforting words of our faith:

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

And our gospel reminds us that with God drawing close to God's creation in the birth and life of Jesus, we have all received gifts far beyond our deserving:

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.

We have ALL received grace, God's love and forgiveness, unearned and undeserved.

On this first Sunday after Christmas Day, when we are reminded of God's lavish love and grace poured out on us, as we lean on and trust in the light shining in the darkness, how then do we respond?

We are called to receive, aware we have earned none of these gifts, that God loves us, that God made us in God's image that we are precious in God's sight, yes each of us, along with the rest of humanity!

So still how then do we respond? If we can't EARN God's love, if we can't prove we deserve God's love, if we simply must accept this gift, how then can we respond?

Well, that question brings me back to the mint.

A friend recently shared this quote with me; the author is unknown:

“You are the gardener of your mind, and you are sowing seeds every moment of every day with the thoughts you think and the actions you take. The seeds you plant today will determine tomorrow’s harvest. Choose mindfully.

Perhaps our response to God’s lavish gifts, God’s grace, can begin in the garden of our minds. As the prophet Isaiah reminded us today:

*For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up....*

A garden causes what is sown in it to spring up. What are we planting in our minds on this first Sunday after Christmas? With the packages unwrapped and the things soon forgotten, what are we doing with the shining everlasting patient gift that God offers us, of love and grace?

Are we sowing seeds of compassion and generosity? Are we sowing seeds of fear, seeds of hate?

Do we tend the gardens of our minds, do we weed out the careless habits, the name-calling and rudeness, or do we let them take root?

Are we planting any mint in our minds, fun and fragrant sure, but also aggressive and thoughtless, left untended overgrowing the rest of the garden?

We can not pay God back for God’s lavish gifts of love and grace, seen so keenly in this season of Christmas in the arrival of Jesus.

But we can respond to God's gifts by being thoughtful and intentional gardeners of our minds, remembering the words of Isaiah:

*For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up....*

Amen.