

Empire Church of the Brethren

Sunday Service Sermons

17 December 2023

God's Affirmative Action Program: The Response

Text: "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." *John 1:11-12*

When the Word that existed from the beginning became flesh and came to earth to dwell among us, when the light that illuminated the life of everyone came to the world that he had created, he was not always well received.

The response to the Word was not always favorable.

God's affirmative action program affirmed people's need for salvation.

He sent his Son, referred to in John's gospel as the Word, to be born on earth for the dual purposes of revealing God and redeeming humankind, explained in John's prologue as life and light.

After a brief account of the man who came to bear witness to the light, John the Baptist, and a disclaimer that John the Baptist was not the light himself but rather a witness to the light, the prologue returns to the description of the Word that became flesh.

The portion of the prologue, *John 1:9-13*, portrays the response that people gave to the light of God.

The response was generally negative.

Jesus came to his own earth to his own people, yet he was rejected by them.

But sometimes the response was positive.

Some accepted him, and to them he gave the privilege of becoming the very children of God.

Today we are going to consider the response to God's affirmative action program in more detail.

And consider carefully your own response to it.

The response involves particularity.

Nothing is ever universal until it is first local.

The universal light that could light up the life of every person in the world existed from before the beginning of the world came into this world at a particular place on the globe and at a particular time in history.

It is one thing to talk about the great universals such as light and life, but they become real to us when those universals are made local.

We best understand light and life only when we see them infuse a single life.

God has always made the universal known by showing us the local and particular.

1. God loves all peoples and all races, but through a particular people, the Jews, God revealed himself.
2. God loves all families of the earth, but in a particular family, the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God worked out his love.
3. God delivers all people from the bondage of sin, but in particular event, the exodus, God demonstrated his power of deliverance.
4. God existed for all time, created the world, and desired to reconcile sinful humankind to himself, but in a particular person, Jesus The Christ, the Word who became flesh, God made his plan for salvation known to all people,.

Nothing is ever known until it is first experienced.

What God had been trying to get across to all of humankind was experienced in Jesus Christ.

Then it became known to people.

They could see the light that shone brightly in our world because of Christ's coming into the world. All people had the potential to have their own lives illuminated by that light.

Everything that had been known intellectually about acceptance, forgiveness, and family could finally be experienced.

God's love for all humankind became evident when the light that was the Word entered the world he had created in the particular person of Jesus of Nazareth.

This event is what we celebrate at Christmas.

The response involves personality.

The personality shows continuity.

John was careful to show the continuity of the Word that existed from the very beginning and the personality that we know as Jesus of Nazareth.

The Christ who was born into the world on that first Christmas was not different from the God who had existed always.

He was that God.

There was a continuity in his existence.

He was in the world already; in fact, he had always been in the world.

But in the birth of the baby in Bethlehem, the one who had always been in the world took on a particular personality that we could see and know.

The personality shows creativity.

The same God who had always been in the world, who had in fact created the world, chose to enter his world as a baby.

No wonder that angels sang!

No wonder the star shone brightly!

It was a time for joy and wonder: the Savior was born!

The personality shows closeness.

The God who had always been in the world had not actually been introduced to the world.

Through the birth of Christ, God became close to us.

He could be seen by us.

He could be touched by our hands.

John wanted to emphasize this point.

In his day, many people believed that matter was evil and that a good God could not have created a world composed of matter.

So they invented the idea that through a series of emanations from God came one who was so far removed from God that he could dwell amid the evil matter.

John, on the other hand, went to great lengths to clarify that the eternal God not only created matter, he took on human flesh; he became matter.

When he had a body and a personality, he could be seen, touched, and really known.

God was personified in Jesus when the Word became flesh.

The response involves practicality.

Because God took on human flesh and became a person in Jesus Christ, everyone is confronted with the Christ and forced to make a choice.

The light that can illuminate every life in the world has to be received.

God did not force himself into the world, nor does he force himself into human lives.

People must choose to reject Jesus or to accept him.

Rejection of Christ.

People can choose to turn away from the light.

They can refuse the life that he offers through faith.

This scenario is expressed in the prologue of John's gospel.

Christ came into the world that he had created, but the world did not receive him.

He came to the people whom he had made and to whom he had made himself known, but his own people did not receive him.

Acceptance of Christ.

People can choose to turn toward the light.

John said that those who accept Christ are given the right to become the children of God.
Notice that those who become the children of God do so through the miraculous means of new birth, not by human will or effort.

God's grace has made redemption possible.

We become a part of God's family by grace through faith,.

Each of us must respond to God's affirmative action program.

Will we reject Christ and continue to live in darkness?

Or will we accept Christ and step into the light.

Then live a life worthy of our calling.

A life that shines that light of life on the source of that light, God himself.

Thusly bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth.