

An IN PERSON Christmas:
THE Christmas Gift
December 5, 2021

Overarching Theme: In 2021, FUMC will be SENT with the peace of Christ!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

On Easter evening, the Risen Christ appears to his gathered disciples for the first time since Good Friday and speaks these words: "*Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you*" (John 20:21). Just as Jesus sent his disciples into a divided, conflicted 1st Century with his peace, so he sends us into a divided, conflicted 2021 with his peace.

Reflect on this Scripture: John 1:10-13 NRSV 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.*

This Week: John 1:10-13

In vv. 9-13, the joyous celebration of the Word (and the light and life the Word offers) gives way to the complex reality of human response. What does it mean to not accept the Word? In the context of the Prologue, it means to deny that the Word is God's self-expression in the world. More specifically, in the context of vv. 6-8, it means not to accept that Jesus, to whom John the Baptist bears witness, is God's self-expression, that Jesus is the Word, the source of life and light for all people (vv. 4-5).

The rejection of the Word by Jesus' own people is restricted neither to the time of Jesus nor to that of the Fourth Gospel. The specific referent of "his own" is never explicitly identified in the Fourth Gospel (cf. 4:44). It stands as a figure for those on whom Jesus has some prior claim but who nonetheless reject him. In Jesus' time (and the time of the Fourth Evangelist) those on whom that prior claim had been made were the Jewish people, to whom the Word of God had

been spoken before (cf. Heb 1:1), who had shared in God's story from "the beginning" (Gen 1:1). For contemporary Christians, however, the identification of Jesus' "own people", those on whom Jesus has prior claim, requires more interpretive work. The rejection of Jesus by those who have shared in the story of the incarnation from "the beginning" (John 1:1) is the true tragedy, and the church may sometimes find itself in the ironic role of Jesus' rejecting "own."

Verses 12-13 highlight the tragedy of rejection by describing the fresh possibilities offered to those who believe. In these verses, the people who did receive Jesus are identified as those who "believed in his name." At this point in the Prologue, the name of the Word is Jesus (literally "God saves") and those who receive Jesus thus believe that God's salvation is available in Jesus. This belief is the beginning of a new relationship with God, because those who believe are now children of God (1:12). Those who receive the incarnate Word become new people and enter into a new life with God (cf. 3:3-8).

The drama of rejection and acceptance of vv. 9-13 thus places a vivid choice before the reader: to either accept the Word and participate in a new relationship with God or reject the Word and receive nothing of the life and light the Word offers.

-- Adapted from New Interpreters Commentary, Vol IX, p. 525

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. Some people in Jesus' day did not accept or receive Jesus as the Messiah/Christ (John 1:11). Apparently even John the Baptist wasn't sure that Jesus was meeting Messianic expectations, sending his followers to inquire of him "*are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else*" (Luke 6:19)? What do you think people were expecting in a Messiah that made Jesus questionable to them?
2. Conversely, many others did receive Jesus. Why do you think they 'believed in his name?' If you are in the latter camp, why do you believe?
3. The sermon referenced Jesus' miraculous feeding of the multitude (John 6). Afterwards many of the multitude wanted to make Jesus "*king by force*" (6:15), seemingly so that he would continue providing bread on demand. When Jesus challenged them to seek more than physical bread, many walked away, rejecting his offer of an enduring, eternal '*bread of life.*' What does this say about what motivated their spiritual lives?
4. Some seem to seek Divine help seasonally (when they have a pressing personal or family need), but not on a consistent basis. How would you describe your own spiritual journey? Are you more seasonal in your spirituality (personal need driven), or do you try to '*stay in love with God*' (to employ Wesleyan terminology)? What helps you with consistency?

5. John 1:12 reveals THE Christmas gift – “the power to become children of God... born of God.” How does being a member of God’s own family impact you personally?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC and/or journal in the “*Morning by Morning*” gratitude resource.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: John 1:12-13 *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.*