

The Word and the World

Craig D. Atwood

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John 1:1-18 (omitting 6-8, 15)

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 were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

(John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”)

For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the calendar year can be very busy time. So many things that we couldn't take care of during the Christmas holidays we now have to attend to. It is a time to undecorate and sweep up the dried needles that fell from the tree. Businesses close out one year's books and start another.

My email inbox is stuffed with merchants desperately seeking my attention and urging me to do something new. I know that many people are trying to

follow their New Years resolutions by going to the gym or dieting. I gave up New Years resolutions years ago, but I do find that the New Year provides a nice opportunity for self-reflection as we look back on what happened in our lives and what we can look forward to in the new year.

“IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD”

Our gospel lesson provides a perfect opportunity for self-reflection for our personal lives and our life as a congregation. These verses are a prologue for the Gospel of John, and many scholars think that they were originally part of an early Christian creed. This passage includes some of the most beautiful and profound words of scripture; words that call us to consider beginnings and new beginnings as we turn the pages of the calendar.

Thanks to John Calvin and other theologians, people tend to think of Christianity in the language of law courts and tribunals, but John’s Gospel uses poetry to describe the work of Jesus Christ.

John does not begin his account of the good news of Jesus Christ with his birth or his genealogy or his baptism like the other gospels. John begins with the beginning of the world itself. John repeats the first words of the book of Genesis: In the beginning. What was in the beginning according to John? Was there chaos, monsters, fire, darkness, fear, or nothingness? No. In the beginning was the Word.

John uses the Greek word Logos, which means word. We still use logos as the root of many of our modern words: Psychology, Sociology, Theology, and Logic, to name a few. Notice that these words all relate to understanding and reason.

Logos is not just any word. There is another Greek word for the everyday words we speak. Logos is a word that makes sense. Logos is the opposite of Babel, which is the incoherent sounds that assault us each day in our modern world. It is the opposite of chaos and confusion and frustration. Logos is different from the mindless chatter that fills our inboxes and televisions.

When God spoke the Word order emerged out of chaos; light emerged from darkness. The Word spins the planets in their orbits around countless stars. The Word spins electrons around the nucleus of atoms. The Word called forth life from the ocean depths and then breathed life into humankind. The Word formed us in the image of God. John says that nothing was made without the Divine Word that gives meaning to our human words. The Word creates and redeems the world.

THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND DWELLED AMONG US

John's Gospel is the story of the renewal of creation in Christ Jesus. The Word came into the World in a new form to restore the image of God in humanity. The Word came to earth restore what sin and despair had marred. The one who created us and gave us the gift of language became one of us and called us to himself. The Word of God is the Good news.

We humans share in the wondrous gift of language, the power of the Word. In a small way, we share in God's divine power through our own use of language, our ability to create through Words. We also use the Word to bring light out of darkness and confusion.

Have you ever seen the joy a child feels when they break learn to communicate through speech? Or the joy of mastering another person's language? The Word is powerful. It is a divine joy. The Word of God and our words can create, heal, and restore.

The Word of God is powerful, especially when the children of God take the Word into the world to renew the world.

MISUSE OF THE WORD

But like all forms of power, the divine gift of language can be abused. We know all too well that words can harm as well as heal. Even computer generated words, like AI chatboxes have destroyed lives. Words can grind people down; they can slowly destroy. Words can rob people of hope and convince them that they are worthless. Words can mock desecrate the image of God in each person has. Words can and do kill. Our words are especially dangerous when we claim that we and we alone are speaking the Word of God, especially if we are destroying what God has made. Our Moravian ancestors knew that when the words of the church, including the words of scripture, are used to destroy or demean the image of God in each person, they are no longer the Word of God.

The gospel of John reminds us that the true Word of God brings light and life to the world. The true Word of God brings forgiveness, understanding, and reconciliation. The true Word of God was not spoken in hatred or abuse, but in love. Later in the gospel we read that God so loved the world, he gave his only son. The Word of God is the word of life and hope, not violence and despair.

CONCLUSION

As we partake of Holy Communion this morning, let us think about the words we use in the world. Do our words reflect the Divine Word made

visible in Jesus Christ? Do our words contribute to the healing of the world?
Do our words reflect the light of Christ?

As we enter this new year, let us draw closer to Christ and let his words and example guide our words and actions in the world.

In the beginning was the Word, the creative, life-giving, word. As the Psalmist said, “May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be well-pleasing in your sight, O God, our Lord and redeemer.”

Let us now join our voices in singing Hymn 503 as we prepare our hearts for Holy Communion.