

Christmas 1, Yr. A
December 29, 2019
John 1:1-18

I talked a bit about this Gospel of John when we worshipped on Christmas Eve and contrasted it with the reading that we heard from Luke. You may remember that Christology, or the study of Christ, comes from two different directions. Low Christology begins with the human side of Jesus; hence we have Luke who emphasizes that humanity, beginning with his birth and his need to be protected from Herod, which we'll hear about next week, whose violence and lust for power result in Jesus and his family becoming refugees in Egypt. And then there's High Christology, and we just heard the perfect example of that in the Gospel from John. John places Jesus Christ at the very beginning of creation and identifies him with God the creator. And in doing so, he echoes that first creation – that story told in Genesis. In the beginning, he says and he also uses the metaphor of light. Just as the first thing God created was light, so here too, Jesus Christ is the light – the light that overcomes darkness, the light that enlightens everyone.

We talked about Jesus reconciling all things, holding together things that might appear to be opposites, like God and humans. Luke's story bridges these gaps. So does John's but in a very different way. John is preaching to

both Jews and Greeks and probably to Jews who were living in the diaspora, in the Greek culture. So he needs to talk about Jesus in a way that will make sense to both Jews and Greeks. And he does that by using the word, WORD, to describe Jesus. In Hebrew, the word is DABAR and it means an event, a happening. So the prophets don't say God spoke to me; they say the word of God happened to me. Dabar encapsulates the power of language. Hebrews thought of the spoken word as a dynamic reality, especially when it came to God's word. Go back again to Genesis: God SPEAKS creation into existence. Remember the language? God SAID let there be light and there was light. So a Jew hearing this language would have thought of Jesus Christ, the WORD, as the means by which God's self-expression came into being. They would have understood that in Jesus, God was saying, look this is who I AM. In the Hebrew Scriptures it was thought that to actually see God would be to die; it would simply be too much for a human. When Moses asked to see God's face, God sheltered him with his hand, showing him only his back. But here, it's as if God is saying, I want you to see me – here – look at what I look like as a human being.

And the same word in Greek is LOGOS. But in the Greek it carried a slightly different meaning. It included the ideas of mind and rationality; the Greeks saw it as the creating,

guiding, ordering power of the universe – what made it all and what held it all together. So John is making his own bridge here, saying to the Greeks, “For centuries, you’ve been thinking and writing about the Logos, the power that made the world, the power by which humans reason and understand, the power by which we can come into contact with God. Well, here it is, in the person of Jesus Christ. In Jesus, that creating, illuminating, sustaining mind of God has manifested itself on earth.”

In their different ways, both Luke and John are pointing to perhaps the most significant claim of our Christian faith: the Word became flesh and lived among us. And so it’s been said that when people looked at Jesus, they saw God. Like his father, there was no discrepancy between what he thought, what he said and how he lived.

That’s all pretty abstract, but there’s a great story that says it in a different way.

God, as everyone knows, created the heavens and the earth and everything in them. And, as we are now aware, he created them through the use of words, for words, of course, are power. “Let it be done,” God proclaimed, and it was done. And everything he made was good. Well, God was especially proud and loving of the man and woman he made because he had breathed into them a part of himself, his very spirit. But, not surprisingly, the devil was angry about all of this. So one day, when God

was enjoyed the man and woman, the devil casually happened to walk by. He sauntered up to God and asked him what he liked so much about these creatures. And when God opened his mouth to speak, the devil craftily put a bond upon his tongue so that God couldn't speak! And since God's creative power was in his words, the devil had bound that power. The devil laughed at God and quite had his way with the humans. Well, some eons went by and the devil came back to mock God – he couldn't resist, such was his nature. He taunted God and God responded by lifting up one finger. "One?" said the devil. "Are you trying to tell me that you want to say just one word?" God nodded. The confident devil thought to himself, "I don't suppose that even God could do much harm with just one word, so OK." And he removed the bond from God's tongue, whereupon God spoke his one word; it was a word that gathered up all the love, forgiveness and creativity God had been storing up in his heart during that time of silence. The word he spoke was JESUS. And it was enough.

In this reading, John sets out the themes for his entire Gospel: there's life, and light, and belief and there's also truth. "...he lived among us and we have seen his glory...full of grace and truth.

When I went to law school in Madison, the main entry had that quote from John: you shall know the truth and the

truth shall set you free. Truth, light, the Logos, the power of words – all of that is related.

In the time we have left, I think that the idea of truth especially bears thinking about> We live in a world where there's a lot of spin, but even more destructive, outright lying. Rather than using words to communicate truth, words are often used to MIScommunicate, to obfuscate or confuse, or to excite and inflame passions. In all that the truth often seems hard to find. In fact, sometimes it seems as if the truth is beside the point. Part of that is our current political situation, but part of it also is because we live in what's called a post-modern world, which encourages us to think there is no objective truth at all, only one's opinion, or point of view. I read a book by James Martin, a Jesuit, who was writing about our 21st century with some alarm. He sees the world's problems, whether runaway technology, or wildly increasing inequality, or genocide, or hunger, whatever, as coming to a head and fears that none of the institutions that historically have spoken to these problems are now doing so. The whole of the western world seems to be wrestling with the idea of truth – does it exist? Is there objective truth? Is there right and wrong? But the church is called to preach the Gospel and the gospel can speak to these questions by saying YES, there is truth, God's truth and it's worth fighting for, it's a light shining in the darkness. It's the truth that light will not

be overcome, that God so loved the world that he sent his son, that love is stronger than hate, that life is stronger than death, that we can live in trust and hope, that we can afford to love, that we don't have to be afraid.

But part of the Incarnation, is that as God is present in our world, God also wants us to walk in light, to participate in bringing more and more light and truth into the world.

Perhaps we find it humorous when we read Mark Twain saying that "If you can fake sincerity, you've got it made." Or Groucho Marx saying, "These are my principles. If you don't like them, I have others." But it's not humorous when we remember Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi propagandist saying, "We do not talk to say something, but to create an effect." That's not at all funny, because we know what effects they were able to create.

The Biblical view of truth is that it's finally and ultimately absolute, it's real, it's the way the world IS and that faith in God means that we know God and God's promises to be trustworthy and dependable. And if we count ourselves as God's children, who have received God's WORD, then we are committed to live in accordance with that Word – the word of light and life and truth and love.

Jesus Christ is showing us the way, lighting the sidewalk to God's house.

Amen.