



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

In the beginning was the Word_ - Christmas Day- 12_25_2021

I speak to you as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness. Amen.

One of the most amazing passages of scripture that I've read over the course of my life is this passage from the Gospel of John: "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."

The majesty and might of Christianity, the power of Christianity, the good news that is shared with us through the Christian faith is that God came into being through Jesus Christ. And this manifestation of God, this incarnation of God was not a moment of inspiration, but a moment of revelation that God was perfectly disclosed to us in the shape and history of Jesus Christ.

So that for us to know Jesus is to know God. And to see in Jesus' life and death, in His love, in His leadership, in everything He does, a kind of revelation, a kind of perfect replication of God's own self. Christianity does not have a guru. Christianity does not believe in a prophet. Christianity believes in a God who was made flesh and come among us. And finding our way to that God and understanding the implications of what that means is something that we spend the rest of our lives doing.

I love this first line from the Gospel of John because here Jesus is described as the Word. And if you've been to church for longer than 10 minutes, you've probably heard that the Greek word that is used for word is *logos*. That's what appears in the New Testament. And that's meant to convey the way that ideas would get implanted in us. To have a *logos* of something is to have a kind of piece of that in us, and then have a piece of ourselves participate in something larger than ourselves, that knowledge. And so it was a good thing that they used that term, that the evangelist uses the term *logo*.

But over the centuries when others have tried to translate this passage, they've actually used different words for the word "Word." Instead of *logos*, it's common to see *sermo*, which is Latin for word, but also for sermon. And the reason why people wanted to use that word *sermo* is that it conveyed a kind of change in affection. No one hears a sermon without feeling differently afterwards, hopefully better, but you certainly feel it one way or the other. A sermon is meant to delight or persuade or to inform, says Aristotle. A good speech of *sermo* is what we have in Jesus Christ. He is God's sermon to you and me. He is God's sermon that speaks a kind of word that is meant to delight and persuade and inform, and in other words, to create a kind of bond and friendship through that word.

Another word that is used to translate the word “Word” in the Gospel of John that you see in some of the early Latin writings is *carmen*, which means song. And this was an inspired translation because of course we read in Psalm 95, “Sing to the Lord a new song.” And so Jesus was the new song, the new *carmen* that we have come to believe. And so that *carmen*, that song of Christ, if we think of it in terms of that reading we just did from John is that God has been storing up in God's self a kind of song.

And like an incredible jazz riff that improvises perfectly, but somehow knows how to speak that language of the music in such a way that you see this powerful revelation through the scales and the melody, coming together in ways that you could never anticipate, God comes to us as Jesus Christ. And that song is meant to be a moment of vulnerability for God. Whenever we sing we make a kind of bid for a listener. To sing is to enter into a kind of vulnerability. People can stop their ears. They can not like what you're singing. They can try to change the tune or block you out in other ways. Songs are powerful.

Still another way of translating that word for “Word” in John's Gospel is *caritas*, you'll see it in the writings of Augustine because that word that was with God was love. And the word that Augustine preferred was *caritas* from which we get charity, but it means something more than just feeling good towards someone or being kind or loving or compassionate towards someone. To engage in *caritas* was to begin a kind of friendship with that person, to build in that friendship a kind of bond that was united by the common holding of the same good – kind of participation in the same good.

And so people would play cards together or do things together or hunt together, or make music together or spend time together or cook together. All of these things can be seen as *caritas*, the kind of intimacy that is built. And so when we talk about Jesus as the *caritas* of God, we talk about Jesus' love coming into our midst and inviting us to begin a friendship with Him. And there is a theme within Christianity that the friendship we have with God, which begins in Jesus Christ as a kind of invitation into the community that is the Trinity of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the end of all things, which begins here, is that we would be with God in a circle of friendship that was ever-expanding and ever-deepening for eternity.

What is your word for “Word”? What is your word for “Jesus”? Is Jesus the *logos* for you, the kind of horizon of thought that helps you find your bearings and make your way in uncertain and unfamiliar places? Is Jesus the sermon to you? A kind of argument that God placed at your feet in the midst of everything you're feeling? A kind of moment in which God lifts you up and puts you back into the game of life, as it were, and helps you to begin again? Is God your *carmen*, your song? So that if you are in the midst of a dark place in the middle of the night, if you want to find your way through that emotional quagmire, you would sing a song to Christ and listen for the song that Christ is speaking to you? Is God your love? Is God the deep friend you need in this time, in this place, in the midst of your loneliness, in the midst of your transitions, in the midst of all the struggles you might be facing today? Because we all struggle during the holidays. That's why we have so many parties.

Who is Jesus for you? For some of you, this is an invitation to go deeper into the narratives of the scriptures. For some of you, this is an invitation to go deeper into your own self-

reflection. For some of you, it's an invitation to see the family that surrounds you and has done their best in their own all-too-human way to love you, to see them as the friends God has put in your way so that you find your way to God.

The one thing I can promise you, and this promise is based in Christmas itself, is that God will find you in Christ, whether it be a word or a sermon or a song of love.

Amen.