

In the beginning was the Verb

John 1:1-5, 10-14

January 1, 2006 First Sunday in Christmas
Celebration of the Lord's Supper

John 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

2 *He was in the beginning with God.*

3 *All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.
What has come into being*

4 *in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.*

5 *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

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.*

14 *And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as
of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

As we begin this new year, we step this morning into the first verses of the gospel according to John. No genealogy recitation of the Infant's ancestry can be found here as in the gospel according to Matthew; no account of John the Baptizer's thundering voice in the desert as Mark records; nor do we read of a heavenly messenger's visit to a teenage girl named Mary. Rather, John tells a different story asking us to step back from such detail and minutiae to consider the presence of God-with-Us from a cosmic perspective. Read every Christmas Eve service, and often on the first Sunday in Christmas (yes, the Church is still celebrating the birth of the Christ Child until January 6! Merry Christmas!), the beauty and lyrical grace of these verses roll around in the mouth with ease, springing off the lips and out to the world in majestic poetry. Perhaps these words are well-known to you; perhaps they are new to you. Regardless, their power and magnificence find a way to enter deeply into the psyche of the hearer, to set our minds to wonder, silence, awe.

Growing up as I did as the daughter of a preacher man, I have heard these verses since a wee thing. For whatever reason, they have captured my imagination and I never seem to tire of hearing or reading them. But about 20 years ago, while on a Presbytery-sponsored study trip to Central America, I heard these oh-so-familiar verses read in Spanish. In that moment, I heard them in a way I had never heard before. I don't mean a difference in language and sound; rather, a difference in meaning. Let me read the first verse to you in Spanish. "*En el principio era el Verbo, y el Verbo estaba con Dios, y el Verbo era Dios.*" Literally, "*In the beginning was the Verb, and the Verb was with God, and the Verb was God.*"

En el principio era el Verbo. When I heard these verses read in Spanish, I heard them in the mother tongue of my mother and father, of their parents and of theirs, and in a language I had heard since an infant. No longer were these verses mere poetry expressing

the Greek philosophical concept of the Eternal Logos of God. Nor was I struggling with the cosmic meaning of these verses. Instead, a childhood memory invaded my thoughts – the recollection of standing in my mother’s kitchen where I watched her and her mother prepare a typical Cuban meal of black beans and rice. It was there in that kitchen that I learned some of my first Spanish words. It was there, too, I learned my first Spanish curse words, parroting my grandmother as she cursed at some careless action at the stove that left a burn on her hand. It was there where I was taught to cook. It was there I was embraced and kissed for no reason at all – just because I was!

The coming of Christ whose birth we continue celebrating this day is God’s way of speaking to us in our mother tongue: the language of every day life, of the flesh, of death: our lives of desire, of hope and despair, of bewilderment and joy. God-in Christ, Immanuel, God-with-Us are all ways we attempt to speak of the God who spills out in love for us. This birth, this Presence is body language at its finest, its most sublime.

Do you remember the words of Eliza Doolittle, heroine of the musical “My Fair Lady” when she says to Freddy Elynsford-Hill,

“Words! Words! Words! I’m so sick of words!

I get words all day through;

Don’t talk of stars, burning above; If you’re in love, show me!

Tell me no dreams filled with desire; If you’re on fire, show me!

Have you ever heard said, “Practice what I preach, not what I do?” Have you heard children and youth criticize adults because they accuse us of saying one thing yet doing something else? Does the ever-increasing number of citizens, critical of politicians and cynical of government, continue to grow because what elected officials say and then what they do have no integrity? Words mean nothing when they are not enacted, when they don’t take a form of action.

The good news is that when God speaks, something always happens, something new begins. As when God spoke in the Beginning, when God said, “Let there be . . .” and creation begins: light and darkness, time and space, up and down, land and sea, color and dimension, plants and animals, woman and man. Now God speaks to us again in the Infant Child of Bethlehem. This Word is Verb – pure action: new creation, a new beginning emerging from the very heart of God. How beautifully John writes of what we can barely comprehend: that there is no separateness, no brokenness the being of God. What God says, God does. Speaking and acting are all One in God. The Word is not that of ‘big God’ and little human beings; not a word of a God who asserts divine greatness and power in contrast to human weakness and powerlessness.

What the God we know Christ Child and what God accomplishes is not the creation of a religious people but the creation of human people. Not the birth of God-with-Us to just save our souls but for the renewal of flesh and blood humanity. God speaks love AND shows us love, creates Love that will not let us go – all there in the babe lying in the manger, in the Man hanging on the cross. What Christmas means is that God affirms, in fact, exalts the cause of human beings in the world. It also means that God is not too high and mighty to come down to our playing field and to act within human life, to speak our mother tongue. John’s gospel word speaks of a God who supports every religious and secular movement that enables human life to be fully, authentically human.

Here at the Table, God speaks and acts again – now in bread and cup, word and action mysteriously bound in wheat and wine. Love speaks, Love creates something new in this sacrament: as we take bread and cup into our very selves, you and I are made a new creation, created a holy people, a royal priesthood in love for the world.

On this bright beginning day of the New Year, I ask “What is God’s Word to you today? To this congregation? And what difference does it make? What is your word and act of integrity in response to the Verb made flesh? So as you think on these questions, let us go now, even unto Bethlehem and to this Table, to see this thing which has come to pass that the Lord has made known to us.

In this new year, may the Word of God which spoke at the Beginning of all things, who spoke in the birth of Christ Jesus, speak and act in every arena of your life: in your family life, in your work life, here at Westminster. May God’s Word be the source of all new things and possibility for you. May the Living Verb act within your life, and our life together, in such ways that you and I take on God’s Way of wholeness and integrity, that our words and our actions are one even as God is One. This year, may we embody Christ’s compassion and tenderness not just to some or to those with whom we are comfortable. May we be the body language of God in acts of mercy, justice and peace. May the Verb grant us grace to know that faith is not a concept but a verb that acts what it is we are – Christ!

With anticipation. Amen.