

**Sermon Preached
by Doug King
John 1:1-18
2nd Sunday after Christmas
January 4, 2004**

In the movie "Lost in Translation" Bill Murray plays an aging American actor on the downside of his career who travels to Tokyo to make a commercial for which he has little enthusiasm. As handlers scramble around primping and preparing him for the shoot, Murray has this look on his face which combines cynicism, exhaustion, ennui and bemusement at the situation in which he finds himself. As they start shooting the scene which entails him saying some simple line about how much he loves the scotch being advertised, the young hot shot director cuts him off and vociferously shouts directions at him in Japanese for several minutes. After the tirade is over, Murray turns to his translator who says a single sentence such as, "He wants you to smile more." Murray responds to the translator "Is that all he said" and she blithely nods.

This sequence occurs several times in succession with me the viewer loving every minute of it. What can I say? It struck a chord. Sometimes it feels as if there is an explanation to be found out there about the nature of our existence; about how we should live; about who we are; about who God is; and yet I just cannot seem to get an accurate translation. And even worse, on those Sundays when I preach and it does not quite come together I can almost picture Bill Murray sitting out there in the pews with that quizzical look on his face asking "Is that all God is trying to tell us? Are you sure?"

Fresh off of our nativity festivities we once again find ourselves presented with the new life of Jesus the Christ in our midst. Once again we will journey with Jesus in the weeks ahead and on into lent and all the way to the cross, trying to understand who this man-God is and what he means to us. And I have this tired, nagging fear, that it is going to get lost in the translation. It is as if God is shouting volumes at us in Japanese and we are only picking up simple minded snippets.

"He was in the world and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him." I am not sure why it is so difficult to know this God of ours. Shouldn't we as the children of God be hard-wired a little bit better for all of this? Now, I am not saying that God has not been trying to reach us. There could be no greater effort than the very Son of God becoming human and mortal and being broken and killed just to bring God's Word as close to us as possible. And yet, "the world did not know him."

On some level of course it makes sense that we cannot grasp it all. We are finite people with a multitude of limitations seeking to comprehend what is beyond all boundaries. Anyone who has ever suggested that faith in God has anything to do with what is reasonable was obviously mistaken.

In this new calendar year I would encourage us all to revel in just that, in the unreasonable and improbable nature of what brings us together as a community. As we listen to the scripture being read, let us listen as if it is the first time we have heard the words. Let us step away from the comfortable way we let these old words roll over us. Let us sit up and listen to what we are being told in all of its absurdity and wonder why and how and who this is all about. Instead of starting from the place of all that we think we know about this God who has come to us in human form let us start from the place of all we do not know.

This gift we have received from God is not something to be quickly glanced at and then tossed upon a shelf in our boredom. Jesus the Christ has more facets than we can view in any simple glance and more depth than we can probe in a lifetime. In this new year before us instead of being frustrated by the difficulties of translation from God to humanity, let's be intrigued and drawn in to the challenge. Let us gather and lay out all of the pieces of this puzzle we possess and see what we can do about putting them together. In worship and bible studies and discussion groups and our quiet time alone, let us grapple with and reach out toward our God for illumination and understanding and answers. Let us use our left brains to analyze and study and our right brains to imagine

and day dream. And most importantly let us utilize each other. The reason we practice our faith in community is because it is not an endeavor that is sufficiently engaged in on one's own. We need each other to seek out the answers to these questions beyond any individual person's depth. We need to trust each other to talk openly about our doubts and our beliefs in ways that reach beyond close-to-the-vest Presbyterianism.

On this Sunday as we celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion, as we engage in the mystery of suggesting that somehow our God is present in cubes of bread and thimblefuls of juice, let us place the mystery of the Christ squarely before us. Let us hear it and see it and touch it and taste it as if for the very first time. Let us hear the words 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. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world."

"He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God."

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth...From his fullness we have all

received grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." Amen.