

Second Weekend of Christmas (RCL/A): "The Word in Deed"

John 1:1-18

January 4-5, 2020

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Did a parent or grandparent, older brother or sister, or any other relative ever tell you what was the first word you ever spoke? For many of us it was probably Mama or Dada – because parents teach those names first, but also because they are easy, even natural, for little humans to form with tiny untutored tongues and lips.

As time goes by children learn language, to the point where older family members begin to spell things to throw little people off the scent of what they don't want the kids to know. So I have no idea what my first spoken word was – but I **do** know the first word I learned to spell: it was a sign of things to come. My parents and sisters inadvertently taught me how to spell it by spelling it **repeatedly** in front of me when they didn't want me to understand what they were saying. Imagine their surprise when one day I entered the kitchen, pointed to the cabinet and either requested or demanded, "COOKIES!" Point proven of why my Grandma used to caution the adults around the dinner table: "Little pitchers have big ears."

Of course, just because we know how to understand, speak and write a language doesn't mean we can always communicate well with others. Everybody we met in Scotland could speak English, but that didn't mean we could understand them all. There was a fellow at the car rental booth whose brogue was so strong we had to struggle to sort out the options he was offering us. There was also a waitress in a restaurant whose accent was so pronounced we could only smile politely and avoid the special of the day she had just described with such enthusiasm because the three of us had no idea what she'd said, even

after politely asking her to repeat. When it came time for dessert the guesswork was eliminated because our waiter brought out a lovely tray of pastries and cheese and all we had to do was point!

Communicating well is a challenge. Spoken **and** written words can be unintelligible, garbled, confusing, misunderstood. And so:

*...the Word became flesh and lived among us....* (John 1:14a)

As the living Word of God, the Son describes the Father to us, in words, true, but most importantly in actions.

Literally the author of the Fourth Gospel wrote that the Word “pitched his tent among us” – *and we have seen his glory*. In the old days, when the people of Israel were still nomads, heading through the wilderness toward the Promised Land and even after their arrival, but before they built the first Temple, they housed the Ark of the Covenant in a tent and transported it wherever they went. The Ark held among other things the stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed and manna from the Exodus journey. The Ark was a seat that doubled as a treasure chest. The people believed that the invisible God sat on the seat between statues of two angels. The Ark was really a throne. “Tabernacle” was the name of the tent housing the Ark – and the Presence of the Divine filled that tabernacle with the glory of God. Then, in the fullness of time, out of the Father’s love for us:

*... 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.* (John 1:14)

And yet, tragically, some were blind to the brightness of God’s glory, the Shekinah, shining in and through our Lord Jesus:

*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 [his own home], and his own people did not accept him. (John 1:10-11)*

Last week we heard the murderous story of Herod the Great's slaughter of the innocents to blot out the competition. Herod himself was Jewish. So were the apostles, though, and the first seventy disciples. Indeed,

*...to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God. (John 1:12)*

So here we are, two thousand years later, **worshiping** the living Word of God, the Word made flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ, **reading** the written Word of God, **hearing** the preached Word of God. This Word in all its forms isn't just **descriptive**, it's **dynamic**, power-full. *"In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth... God said, 'Let there be light, and there was light'"* (Gen. 1: 1, 3). God's Word **makes a difference**. It is **living and active** (Hebrews 4:12). It **creates**.

"I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."  
God's Word **changes** things. Through Water and the Word, the newly baptized is a new creation in Christ.

"This is my body, this is my blood. Do this to remember me."  
Through the Word, in the gathering of the faithful, in, with and under bread and wine, Jesus becomes present to us in this Holy Supper. God's Word makes a difference. **We** are changed. God-willing. I actually have a card that says, "It doesn't matter what happens to the Bread & Wine... if we are not changed."

Sometimes, in grace moments, when we are open to it, the Lord channels grace through us to change others. It **may** be our words that make a difference: but more likely it will be our actions. **Our actions have the potential to be sign language for the**

**spiritually deaf.** For those who don't know or understand the words of Scripture, for those who have been deafened to "church speak" by the institutional church's rejection of who they are or apathy toward what they need, for those who want to see the Gospel in action and not just in theory, lived out and not merely described, **may our lives be a compelling witness to the love of God.**

In a complex and headache-inducing commentary on the Hebrew and Greek meanings of the Word (with a capital W), the Logos, I found this simple but profound spiritual challenge posed to us by today's Gospel:

"This is our august [sacred, solemn, holy] vocation. So to live that those about us will see God in us."<sup>1</sup>

Francis of Assisi's more memorable way of saying that was:

"Preach the Gospel. If necessary, use words."

Amen.

<sup>1</sup>*The Interpreter's Bible* (vol. 8, Nashville: Abingdon, 1952), p. 477.

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