

The Eternal Word
January 4, 2009

It can be a little confusing when we speak of the Word of God, in the church because the term refers to at least three different things. First, the Word of God is Jesus Christ himself, the Word made flesh. Second, the Word of God is the Bible, God's revelation to us. Each Sunday, after the Scripture lesson is read, we note that Scripture is the Word of God when we say together: this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God! Third, the Word of God includes the words we proclaim each Sunday worship service through the liturgy, especially in the sermon and the sacrament. This morning, we will be receiving the Lord's Supper, which is God's Word to us. We call all three the Word of God because they are all sources of revelation: they tell us about God, who is active in the world, meeting us here and now.

In John's prologue, he tells us about the Word of God, not as the Bible or as the words spoken in worship, but as the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. What does it mean to say that Jesus is the Messiah? Listen now to God's Word in Holy Scripture.

John 1:10-18:

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. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") 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 God known.

One: This is the Word of the Lord. All: Thanks be to God!

Let us pray a prayer written by Saint Patrick: May God's might direct us, God's power protect us. May we have God's wisdom for learning and God's eye for discerning. May we have God's ear for our hearing and God's Word for our clearing. And may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, for you are our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

Words, words, they are all around us. When you buy a new cell phone or digital camera, the store gives you a two-hundred-page instruction manual: I am impressed if anyone here is actually able to read anything close to the entire thing. Prior to the year

1500 AD, there were around a thousand books written in Europe each year. Since 1960, there are on average one thousand new books printed each and every day. There is countless information available at our fingertips on the internet. There are magazines on celebrity gossip, personal computing, hunting, weddings, professional wrestling, and almost any topic you could imagine. When doing research for this sermon, one of the most unusual magazine titles I found is Modern Ferret, which teaches how to care for your pet ferret.

At times, the words we speak to each other are inane and thoughtless. There are other times when we so desperately want to show our love through words, but we are not sure what to say and we are simply unable to bring the right words to our lips. There are times our words can strike a chord and lead others to a long, hearty laugh, tears of joy, or cries of sorrow.

We all want to hear those words that will make a difference in our lives. The couple that is trying so hard to get pregnant to no avail wonders if God has called them to be parents. Those teenagers who feel excluded want to hear the words that they are accepted for who they are. Those parents or grandparents who are dealing with a rebellious child and feel woefully inadequate for all the challenges they face want to know that their child will turn out okay. Those who feel lost and unsure of themselves want to see that their lives are not simply a random series of events, but that their lives have a greater purpose. The spouse that provides care for her aging husband with the initial stages of dementia, wonders what is in store for both of them.

I think, I hope, each of us shows up at church each week with a sense of anticipation. Amidst all the words we hear in our lives, we want to hear something true, something lasting. In the midst of the tragedy we see around us, we want to hear Good News. We may wonder in those times when God seems silent, what is God trying to tell us? Is God speaking to us at all? The prophet Jeremiah sums up how many of us feel when he asks, "Is there any word from the Lord?"¹ We long to hear words that matter.

In today's Scripture lesson from John's Gospel, we hear, yes, there is a word from the Lord, and it is a good word about God's Son. What should have been impossible is not: the divine has become human, the immortal has become mortal, and the eternal has entered into our time. Yes, God's Son became fully human, but from the very start John wants us to know that this is no ordinary person: he is also fully divine.

What does John 1 tell us about the second person of the Trinity? We know at least three things about the Word: first it is eternal; second the Word is the best, truest source of divine inspiration; and third the Word is personal.

The Logos or Word of God is eternal. John tells us that God did not create the Word. In fact, Jesus Christ, as the Word, was there with God at the dawning of creation, establishing the heavens, the stars, and the universe. Not one thing came into being without the Word's involvement. And so we also know that from the beginning of time, the eternal Word has been a part of the divine plan and has even been a partner with God the Father.

¹ Jeremiah 37:17.

The person of Jesus Christ is the truest source of divine revelation. Jesus Christ is the Word of God because he shows us best of all who God is. In the Old Testament, God is often portrayed as a jealous and vengeful God. After Jesus comes, the New Testament focuses much more on grace and love. Does that mean that God changes from the Old Testament to the New Testament? No, I do not believe God changes; our understanding of who God is changes.

We now have first hand information about the character of God because the second person of the Trinity walked around on this earth. Rather than leaving us to speculate and theorize about who God is, Jesus shows us what God is like. We know God is concerned for us in our grief and mourning because Jesus cries when his friend Lazarus dies. We know that God forgives us and gives us second and third chances because Jesus forgives the disciples and continues to involve them in his ministry. We know that Jesus wants to feed our bodies and souls because he gave bread and fish to the multitudes, and he also shared that we cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from God's mouth.

Third, the Word of God is personal. The Word of God is not just some abstract, amorphous spirit. The Word is, by its very nature, relational. The Word has a close relationship with God; John tells us that the Word is near and dear to God's own heart; they relate to one another as Father and Son. The Word meets to humanity through Jesus Christ, who came not to be served, but to serve. He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, washing his disciples' feet, teaching people in parables about God's kingdom, instructing people about the truth, accepting and eating with outcasts and sinners, and ultimately dying and rising to give us life and life abundant.

What is at stake for us when we put our faith in Jesus as the eternal Word of God? C.S. Lewis, in his book Mere Christianity, writes that we do not have the option to look at Jesus Christ as merely a cute, harmless baby or as an insightful teacher or as an inspirational prophet. We have only three options for how we view Christ: he was either a lunatic, a liar, or our Lord.

Jesus Christ claimed to be the Messiah, God's own Son. Christ told us that he brought God's salvation into the world. Christ claimed to be the resurrection and the life. Christ intended for his followers to be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that our lives would be marked by grace, truth, and Christian love. Christ told us that he sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. Since Jesus made these bold claims, Lewis argues that Jesus is either a lunatic, "on the level of a man who says he is a poached egg or else he would be the Devil himself" for telling lies that get his followers to put all their hopes and dreams in him.

John shares with us the good word that Jesus was not a liar or a lunatic; instead Jesus Christ was, is, and will be the Lord of all creation! He is the Word of God who came to dwell among us, full of grace and truth. Thanks be to God for the eternal Word of God! Amen.