

“The mystery of the silence from which the Word comes is the deep and abiding relationship of the Trinity. It is of love for humanity, for the universe that God made room to create.”

Rev. Adrienne Meier

**January 3, 2021, Second Sunday of Christmas, Year B
St. Thomas Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Indiana**

The Key

John 1:1-18 NRSV, emended

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 overcome it. There was a man, whose name was John, sent from God. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. John 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 (the true light) 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—children born not of blood or of the will of the flesh or human will, but of God.

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. 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's only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made God known.

You've probably at least tried your hand at a Cryptoquip before. Some people really love these puzzles. Strange people. Just kidding. These puzzles work by taking a well-known quote and changing the letters for other letters, so E=R and S=I and so on. You get a little hint about the quote and just one letter solved for you, the key. You solve the puzzle most often by finding little words like "the" or single letter words like "I" and "a." Of course, if you don't know the quote, you have little chance of solving it. Personally, I find these little puzzles to be the most vexing, frustrating little...well, they often end up crumbled on

the floor. The key for me, when it comes to these puzzles, is...not to start. And yet, sometimes it would be helpful if there were a little key for life. A little letter that could help us unscramble the highs and lows of our lives, for understanding the pain and suffering of the world, for helping us live out our faith. John, the gospel writer, says there is, in fact, a key to all this - something that creates us, that connects us, the gives meaning to our lives. The key to our understanding is the Word.

John starts his gospel in the beginning. Not with a story about Mary and Joseph and a baby, not with shepherds, angels, and stars. He begins before that. He begins with the Very Beginning. With creation. Which does in fact, begin with a word. God says, "Let there be light," and there is light. Word after word calls sun, moon, stars, water, land, fish, birds, and animals into being. We are created by the Word. The rhetorician and literary philosopher Kenneth Burke theorizes that just as we create language, language creates us. He says, "We use and are used by our words." I interviewed a Burke scholar, one who I happen to share a roof with (that is, my spouse, Dr. Matthew R. Meier), and he explained this further, saying, "With words we create expectations about who we are and who we will be. It is when we describe things that they become meaningful." Creation is, in many ways, God's poem of love for what we could be. It is a song of expectation. The Word takes quarks and names them, from them creates protons and neutrons and describes them, forms them into atoms into matter and names them, gives them purpose. The Word is woven into the very fabric of the universe. As St. John says, "not one thing came into being apart from [the Word]." The Word creates us.

In this way, the Word also connect us. Language is, in many ways, the heart of relationships. When we fall in love we seek to understand one another, and language is how we do that. Some argue that the very capacity for language makes relationship possible. But more than that, we confess that God is a relationship - connected as parent to child, as body to spirit. When John tells us that the Word was in the beginning and now, at this prescient moment, the Word comes to dwell among us - the Greek is actually very specific, the Word "pitched her tent among us." When John tell us that the Word dwells among us, John is telling us... Well, that the Word isn't just Shakespeare or John Donne or Rumi or Mary Oliver mining the depths of our humanity in order to connect us with ourselves and each other. This Word connects us with God. Because the Word is the means by which we understand God and only thus, the means by which we understand ourselves.

The Desert Father Abba Issac once said, "Words are meant to describe the mystery of the silence from which they come." When the Word is spoken, the Word speaks of the love of God that created the world and sustains it. The Word speaks of a love so deep it triumphs over sin, death, and the devil. The mystery of the silence from which the Word comes is the deep and abiding relationship of the Trinity. It is of love for humanity, for the universe that God made room to create.

So where does that leave us? As I said, the key to understanding our humanity is the Word. Thomas Merton once said, "We are all words spoken by God. Our calling is to learn how to pronounce ourselves."

As with all of creation, the Word is woven deeply into you, now you learn how to speak it. How do you speak of the love God has for humanity? How do you speak of connection God has with us and within God's self? How do you speak a word that creates life and light to all who hear it? That is the key to living, Beloved, to speak the Word so all can hear.

Amen.