

"And the word became flesh and lived among us,..." John 1:14
2nd Sunday after Christmas, 2009. Roy A. Harrisville III

The Word is Jesus Christ. The Word of which John speaks is the only begotten Son of God; Christ Jesus, born in a manger in Bethlehem, baptized by John the Baptist, crucified, risen, and ascended. He is the word of God.

As the Word of God created the world and the universe in the beginning, so too Christ Jesus was there with God, for He is God. From the very beginning, before which time there was nothing, Christ the Lord was with God the father. The one whom we worship is not only the historical figure of a man who walked upon earth but the eternal power of God himself who from the beginning has brooded over this vast realm of creation and kept it alive through the eons.

When we say that we believe in Jesus Christ the only Son of God we mean that we believe in someone who has existed before time itself. We confess that our God is the true God, the only God, the eternal God and His earthly name is Jesus.

Pages and pages have been written on this one subject of the Word of God. We could spend all day tracing its origins in Jewish philosophy and ancient wisdom literature. We could delve into its early use by the Christian church. After all, it's clear that John's readers in the first century would have understood what the "word" meant since John never explains it. They must have known what it meant. They must have known that the Word of God was the power of God, his omnipotent, creative energy, which once, in a small town in Judea, became flesh and lived among us. He took human form and dove down into our world and wrapped himself up in bones and muscles and skin and took our shape, our sins and our death upon himself. This word this eternal power and glory, this truth of God, became finite and worn out and aged and wrinkled and suffered humiliation and death. Yet, we confess that it is this very word which has conquered all things. We confess with our lips that it is this word which has robbed death of any power over us, sin has been defeated, and heaven opened for all who believe.

But this wondrous dawn of light has been rejected down through the ages. It was rejected by his own people who didn't want him and by all creation which killed him. He came to God's chosen people and they didn't want him. He came to his own world, the object of his special love, but it didn't want him either. The only way that any body has ever been able to believe in this Word made flesh has been through God's will. It has not come about through the choices that you or I make, through our powers of any kind, but only through the will of God are we made his children who accept and bask in the light.

The world has not received the Word with open arms because it does not really want God the eternal Spirit in the heavens, getting personally involved in our world. Most rational creatures want a God far away and quiet or no God at all. There's a song that sings of God watching us from a distance. It's a nice tune. But if God is watching us from a distance then he can hardly see how much we are in need of help. If God is watching from a distance, then how can he see the starving children in Malawi, or the anxiety of the jobless? How can God view the suffering of the world from a distance? The answer is that He does not. He is here with us, Immanuel. The Word has power and is eternal and the Word is here among us, and that is threatening to many. The Word will not stay in the heavens or be confined to a box here in earth but will shake out of its prison and touch each life that has ever been or will be.

But many people don't want that kind of God, which is why Jesus was rejected. A lot of people want a God far away, or one that remains at arm's length. That kind of God will not infringe on our freedom. That kind of God will not be able to see what we do under the table. That kind of far away God will be too late to squelch the greed, the lies, and the backbiting. Yes, many people want some kind of God-idea or abstract notion of the Almighty, not one with flesh and bone. If only God would remain up there, beyond the clouds, far from us, then maybe we can be left down here to our own devices and pleasures and claim freedom to do as we please. If God

remains nothing but an ethereal power beyond the real world, then he can't really touch us can he? He can't grab us? He can't catch us!

Jesus was laughed at or ignored by the leaders of his day. Until of course, he came close to upsetting someone's apple cart. At that point they decided he was such a nuisance that they had to get rid of him and they tried their best. They made him an outlaw, illegal, socially unacceptable. Then they killed him and tried to forget about him over the weekend and go on with their lives.

It didn't work. Jesus, the Word of God, wouldn't stay dead. The Word and its power were active again. The Word and its power were re-creating hope even if few ever saw it. Though the Word was surrounded on all sides with darkness and death, neither of those could overcome the light of life. The darkness and the world do not want a personal God who comes to us and takes our part and shows us who is really in charge. That takes away our freedom. That takes away our realm of control. Such a God is too close and robs us of our independence.

"But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God,..." It's true that it's easier to live with a God far away who leaves us alone, but it's also more dangerous. It's simpler if our God stays in the starry heavens, but it's also less bright below. If God had never sent his only begotten son to take on the flesh of humanity and die for our sins, then life would be ultimately without meaning and purpose and each man and woman and child would go about their lives like mindless beasts and there would be no love, no kindness, no light by which to live. We believe in a God who went through life as we do and because the Word became flesh and lived among us, because of that close personal God, we are now assured that death is not some meaningless end to a meaningless existence, but that life has significance and a goal toward which it strives. Life is not merely the bare existence of molecules and organisms, but it has been touched, grabbed, captured and taken into custody by the love of the Word of God and the light of our life. Like it or not, the world needs a God who is

here and not far away, a God who is personal in his love, a God who is closer to us than we are to ourselves. Without that immediate God right next to us, we would never know deliverance from the darkness of a meaningless life.

Many people would not receive Jesus because he was too close, too personal, too real a God on earth. That can be scary. As the Bible says, "It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God." But that is precisely why he became flesh. So that we would not be terrified, unless of course we feel our power threatened. He came in the flesh to comfort our hearts with his hope and give us love and meaning in our lives. Such things are close to us and personal. Such is our God. He is close here in the WORD, here in the sacrament. He is coming to you. Do not fear to take him into your life in the form of the Word that you hear in your ears and that travels to your hearts and minds. That is God coming to you in a real and immediate way. Yes, it can be threatening to some who care about their power and control over their lives. It can be very threatening to those who cherish their personal freedom. But to those looking for meaning and purpose in their lives, it is a gift of immeasurable worth to be able to say that the power of the Creator is at work among us and in us. Even more, this power is at work for us. That is the gospel. That is the good news. It is not a meaningless cold and distant power that is unconscious and without aim. It is a power that exists for us, for our good, for our benefit, for us. Even when the Word strips away our pretense of autonomy and control, even when it lays bare our self-delusions, it does so in order to show us the truth, the truth of who we really are. When that is done, the Word finishes its task by giving His life for us, becoming one of us, living like we do, dying like we do, and rising like we will. The Word has come to give our lives meaning and to give us new life. That is the Christmas message. That is what John means when he says that from the fullness of the Word, from the fullness of Christ Jesus we have received grace upon grace. Do not be afraid. God is near. He is here for us. Amen.