

The First Sunday after Christmas

O Come Let Us Adore Him

12.29.24

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I have shared before how when I first met my husband Jess in college, he liked to greet people with, “Hey, what’s the good word?”

You can’t say *fine* or *all right* to a question like that. And whenever he said it, I’d find myself stopping to search for the actual answer to the question. I loved that question: What’s the Good Word?

It’s a particularly appropriate greeting during Christmastide, especially when we proclaim the glorious hymn that begins the Gospel of John: *In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.* In the beginning, just before the creator spoke everything into being – the sun and the stars and the earth and the seas and the life that teemed over it and quite late in the story, humanity, -- right before that beginning there was the Good Word.

Because for John the story of God’s wild, incarnate and self-sacrificing love for creation doesn’t begin with a decree from Caesar. There’s no angelic visitation, or a stable – though those are all important motifs depending on who is telling the story. John begins at the very beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth. And it begins with the Word.

Linguists will remind us that a word is inherently relational and creative. Words make reality. They not only inform and communicate, but they shape worlds. We are people made of words and stories – spoken and heard, written and read, passed down, made up.

But in this hyper-wordy information age it has become almost impossible to trust words. It’s hard to find truth in them. But they do have an effect, and one can’t avoid their destructive force all around us.

Rather than “*what’s the good word,*” we might find ourselves saying “*where’s the good word,*” or “*Is there any Word from the Lord?*”

On this first Sunday after Christmas, we're in a good place to ask such questions. Here it's just us and the Word. It's just us and the Word made flesh and dwelling among us. It's just us and the word dwelling within us. If all goes well, we'll leave with the Word when all is said and done.

Because if God from the beginning is Word, then we from the beginning were created to be receivers of that Word. We were made with ears to hear it. We were made with eyes to see it. And with voices to proclaim it.

For me, the challenge of faith is to remember to return to the Word made flesh, to Jesus Christ, as a present relationship rather than a distant story or a set of ideals. To do this I have realized that I must find some time and space to tune into the Word that is always speaking to me, to remember that a big part of my side of the relationship with God is to welcome and to receive the Word.

So how do I receive Jesus the Word of God, in this brief Christmas season? How do I make a space for the Christ in my Word-weary brain?

I find that I need to conscientiously put myself in the place and time where God waits for me. And that place and time is the here and now. Because God is always waiting for me in the present.

Now that probably sounds really obvious, that God would be always there in the present moment. It's the wisdom one finds in meditation practices and centering prayer, which I have practiced on and off for years. But I only discovered the truth of it for myself rather recently –when I realized that I have a very difficult time actually being in and staying in the present moment. You've perhaps heard of the Tao of Poo. I would call this the Duh of Barb. So obvious, how could I have missed it for so long?

Well, I missed it because I am an adept time traveler. My thoughts are often imagining or planning for the future. They are regularly reflecting on the past. I travel routinely to the fictional worlds of "what if", and go round and round the running rack of "why." My prayers often take the form of list making – my to-do list for God, or my thank you list to God. I'm not saying that this is a bad thing, or that none of this is part of prayer and worship. It's just that while I'm on my time traveling trip, my sense of the present slips by, moment by moment, and

I come out of it wondering where God is and why life is so complicated, and What is the Good Word anyway?

But every once in a while, usually with the help of a Spiritual Director, I remember that God is waiting for me. God is waiting for me to stop the human doing for a bit and become the human being -- even if it's just for a little while.

And I remember the best way to do this is to clear my head and to breathe, with no prepared prayer attached, no words, no images of a quiet room or a calm sea. It's an essential practice of meditation to pay attention only to the breath, focus only on its going in and flowing out. And any seasoned meditator will tell you that this takes practice. My mind is a skittish thing that takes off like a startled bird. But the practice of the present is to simply return, return to the breath, putting one's whole attention there.

It becomes prayer when I remember that the Word rides on breath, is made of breath. Before there is the stirring of vocal cords, before there is a sound wave that touches our eardrums, there is breath – the silent presence of God.

The Word of God waits for me in my every breath, and if I allow it to be so, I need only focus on that breath to be with God. This is what it is to calm the soul. To listen for the still small voice that is not my own. To return the invitation of Emmanuel, God with us, and to be with God. Another word for this is Adoration.

So to close, I'd like to invite us all to go to that place where Jesus the Word waits for us to be with him in the present in a spirit of adoration. I invite us to breathe in silence for a minute or two and just sit with Emmanuel, the Word of God. You do this by closing your eyes and breathing slowly and putting all your attention completely on your breath. Attend to it as it enters your nose and fills your lungs. Attend to it as it leaves your lungs and your body softens. Keep your thoughts empty and your focus there on your breath, which is a constant reminder of the present moment and the presence of God. If your mind wanders, gently call it to "return" and refocus on your breath.

I invite you to spend several breaths in adoration, relaxing in and relishing the presence of the Word of God, who waits for you in ever present. And when you

hear the word Amen, we'll return to the larger communal prayer that is creed and gift and meal

.... Oh come let us adore him, o come let us adore him, O come let us adore him Christ the Lord. Amen.