

You all know my husband Jim, and you may have noticed that he and I are very different. Jim is very deliberate. He is careful in his speech and his writing. I too am very particular in what I say when interpreting Scripture, so we are very alike in that regard. To Jim what he says is what he means in his heart. But to me, what he does is more meaningful. I need to trust that what is in his heart of hearts is reflected in his actions. Now, I do not measure everyone else the same way as I do Jim. I first get to know how someone communicates – in words or actions or both. Yes, I am hard on Jim, because, in part, we have known one another since Algebra class in high school, but also as my husband. I expect much from him – perhaps too much. I expect even more of myself. Thankfully, most of the time, we both translate well and understand what the other is meaning to say or do. I really think I am much more tolerant since I fell in front of my church at the Easter vigil a few years ago and hit my head, left this world briefly, and was brought back by a surgeon friend doing CPR. The fall knocked some sense into me. My point is that being understood is all about how we communicate and act, as well as, the ear and eyes – the understanding – of the one to whom we are addressing, and how they interpret our words and deeds. Both are so very important, and always have been.

If we were to try to communicate who Jesus was and is we would need to understand the people to whom we are speaking. Here in this country language is sometimes a barrier as well as tradition. The ancients too were hampered by speech and culture. We all know that Christianity began in the Jewish community. Jesus Christ was by birth a Jew, and he rarely left Palestine. The believers of Christ necessarily spoke the language of the Jews and expressed their beliefs in the pattern of Jewish thought. However, by the year 60 A.D. – within 30 years of his death – Christianity had spread to Asia-Minor, Greece, and even to Rome. There were 100,000 Greek believers for every Jewish Christian in the church. And the Greeks had never heard the term Messiah. How could the good news of Christ be communicated to Greeks in a way that they could understand?

Around the year 100 A.D. in Ephesus a man named John tackled this problem of communicating Christianity to the Greeks who found Jewish ideas strange, unintelligible, even uncouth.¹ Both Jewish and Greek heritage understood the concept of “The Word.” For the very deliberate Jews there were less than 10,000 Hebrew words. Greek speech had 200,000. The word was alive and active in the Jewish world. Words were more than a spoken sound; they actually did things. Words had power for all people, Jews and the people of all ethnicities, throughout the Middle East; they still do.

William Barkley tells the story of the Very Reverend Sir George Adam Smith who was a Scottish theologian who traveled extensively and wrote about Syria and the Holy Land. While in the desert in the Middle East in the late 19th century, a group of Moslems gave his group the customary greeting: “Peace be upon you.” When they discovered that they had spoken a blessing to a Christian infidel, they hurried back to ask for the blessing back again.² The word was like a thing that could be sent out to do things. But could it be taken back again too.

To the Greek people the concept of “The Word” began 600 years before Christ.³ The Greek philosopher Heraclitus observed that everything – everything – is in a constant state of change. Why then was the world not in total chaos? Heraclitus answered that the changes in the world are not haphazard at all; they are controlled by “The Word” – by the reason of God. What controlled the events in the world was – and still is, many would argue – was Logos – God dwelling within humans – giving us reason and knowledge of the truth and the ability to judge between right and wrong.

So the writer of John began with a concept that Jesus is Logos – is “The Word” of God with us. The word became flesh and dwelt among humans – the mind of God became a person. Then Jews and Greeks alike could understand. John told them both – and he tells us – that they – and we – no longer needed to “guess and grope”; all that they had to do was to look at Jesus and see the Mind of God.⁴

Philip in the portion of the 1st chapter of John that we read today, took “The Word”, took Jesus, to his friend Nathanael. Philip had met the Lord and was so excited he could not

contain himself. He had to share the good news of what he had found this man from Nazareth in Galilee. Philip believed that this Jesus was the Messiah that had been promised to the Jews. Nathanael appeared to be a skeptic. He knew the Hebrew Scriptures well, and it said nothing about the Messiah coming from Nazareth. Nathanael came from Cana in Galilee, and whether because of local rivalry or from personal knowledge, he declared that Nazareth was not a place from which anything good had ever come. So what did Philip do? Did he point out the charisma that Jesus had? Surely there were many prophets who were charismatic. Did he argue with Nathanael? No, arguments often do more harm than good. Philip simply said, “Come and see.” Come and see what Jesus has done, and what he is doing now. Philip didn’t argue with Nathanael or preach to him. He just ask him to come with him and see what the Lord had done. *Adeste fidelis* – that *Ericca* sang in Latin at Christmas – “Come all ye faithful” that we sang – come and see, you people of faith. And Nathaniel was faithful in his heart; Jesus had seen what was in his heart as he rested under that fig tree. So Philip simply said Come and see, Nathaniel. Come and see.

There is a story about the renowned agnostic, Thomas Henry Huxley, who was at a country house party.⁵ On Sunday as people were getting dressed and heading out to church, Huxley approached someone who was known for his faith, and asked him to skip church and stay home and explain why he was a Christian. The man said he was not clever enough to counter Huxley’s arguments. But Huxley convinced him that he did not want to argue but to hear what Christ meant to him. So the Christian simply explained his faith to the great agnostic. He told what Jesus had done for him. When he finished, Huxley, with tears in his eyes, said: “I would give my right hand if only I could believe that.”

Philip did not argue with Nathanael. He simply expressed his faith and invited Nathanael to “Come and see.” Nathanael went with Philip, and, of course, Jesus already had seen into his heart. Jesus had read Nathaniel’s heart, understood his heart, and had satisfied all the longings of his heart. Philip knew how to communicate. He knew arguing would never win Nathanael’s heart for Christ.

Our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry is recovering well after another surgery on January 6th for another recurrence of a subdural hematoma. He has been moved from ICU to a regular hospital room. He calls us the Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement. My friends, I know that our Presiding Bishop would reiterate that all we need do to further the Jesus Movement is to ask others to come and see for themselves. Yes, we need to know Jesus ourselves before we can invite others. We need to be able to simply and succinctly express out faith and simply offer an invitation. Yes, we – like my Jim – have to be deliberate in choosing our words, but we also need to know that our sincerity will be measured by what we do. We need only claim Christ Jesus to be the mind of God and point to the work he has done to reveal God to us in our heart of hearts through the good work that we do in his name.

Lord, may it be so. Amen.

¹ William Barkley, Daily Study Bible, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dsb/john-1.html>.

² *Ibid.*

³ This was actually in Ephesus where the Gospel according to John would be written centuries later.

⁴ See William Barkley site above.

⁵ T. H. Huxley, the renown English biologist and anthropologist, was an outspoken defender and advocate for Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection. He was the grandfather of Aldous Huxley, author of *Brave New World* who acknowledged (dare I say, embraced) the active Divine in the world.