

*1<sup>st</sup> SUNDAY IN ADVENT*

*November 27, 2016*

*St. John 1:1-4 and Hebrews 1:1-3:*

***“The Word During Advent: Sustains”***

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

There's a joke about a man who crossed a parrot and a tiger. He told his friends that he wasn't quite sure what he got as a result. Nevertheless, when it spoke, he listened!

Two majestic statements come together in our gospel and epistle lessons for this morning. John speaks of the "Word," and the writer to the Hebrews refers to God's "Son." The Word became flesh - one of us. Jesus of Nazareth is no ordinary man. He is the revelation of the Father, the speaking of His heart, God of very God, equal with the Father, the source and sustainer of life. You might recall that it was on the mountain of transfiguration that the appearance of Jesus' face became altered, his clothing became dazzling white, and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!"

Indeed! "Listen to him!" It's much larger than the old E. F. Hutton commercial isn't it? Two guys walking through a noisy airport full of people getting their luggage. One says to the other, "My broker says in the long run that kind of investment could be a good idea. What's your broker say?" The other guy responds, "Well, my broker is E. F. Hutton, and E. F. Hutton says . . ." And with that, everyone in the airport stops what they are doing, the noise turns into dead silence, and the narrator says, "When E. F. Hutton talks, people listen!"

If only that were the case when it comes to Jesus. If only people would listen. "In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son," it says in Hebrews. What are we going to do with **The Word During Advent**? The truth is that we are much more interested in hearing about stuff like investments down here rather than stuff about sin, forgiveness, and treasure in heaven. But, lest we forget, through Jesus Christ the Father created the world, and "he upholds the universe by the word of his power." Jesus **sustains** all things and is therefore above all things. As it is written in the book of Acts, "In him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28)."

And isn't it amazing how many people outright complain to God that he never speaks to them? I am reminded of the man who locked himself in a room and waited all night for God to give him a sign of his existence. When God didn't speak to him in the way he demanded, he then walked out of the room a self-proclaimed atheist. How ironic it is to consider that God created and had been **sustaining** this man all along, even before he walked into the room, and even when he walked out! The prophet Isaiah says in the first verse of his famous 53<sup>rd</sup> chapter, "Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

When John calls Jesus "the Word," while saying that all things were made through him, that he was not only with God but was God in the very beginning, he is reaching out to us on a level by which we may understand some important matters. Everyone of us has a word that is spoken. While our word is not a distinct person, nor can our word create something out of nothing, it is still a word that is a revelation of what is hidden in us and a word that moves ears and the beings of others. By my word you will get to know me on the basis of what is inside of me (unless I'm lying). A word makes known a hidden thought, and a word of mine can directly effect you to either embrace me or refrain from embracing.

On the basis of what we say, others know who we are. In the case of Jesus, he is the Word of God the Father and is the declaration of who God is and his will for us. This is quite different than a word we might speak. In the case of Jesus the Word, he is one with the Father and yet a distinct person. Whatever the Father does is through the Son and with the movement of the Holy Spirit (his breath). Consequently, the creation itself is of the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. God speaks and it is. Notice the three: God; Speaks; and It Is. Not only is this the case for the creation, but it is also true to say of the way the creation is sustained, redeemed (bought back from sin and death), and sanctified (made holy).

In John 1:4 it says of Jesus that "in Him was life, and that life was the light of men." Not only can we affirm that Jesus is life, that it is his personal possession, his prerogative, but we can know that Jesus was uncreated. No one gave him life, for he is life with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He is truly the Son of God, equal with the Father, and in his work of creation, his life gave light to created humanity.

One interpreter has suggested that John's words might be given a modern twist by translating them: "In the beginning God Expressed Himself, and that very Expression was with God and was God." Consider the inconceivably vast universe that surrounds us. Why were all things made? The answer: "Because God wanted to express Himself - to display himself to us that we may properly understand him, acknowledging a right relationship with him, in order to finally prepare us to receive him as our forever companion in the most intimate face to face relationship possible." Consider yourself as well as the past, present, and future world of humanity. Why are you what you are? Why are you here? The answer: "Because God wants to express/give himself intimately to you - his goodness and his love - to creatures fashioned in His own image, complementary counterparts with thought, word, and action; to creatures that are not programmed, but able to truly say "no" to him.

And, of course, that is what the first man and woman did. They said "no" and we said "no" with them, for it would not have mattered who the man and woman were, for all of us would have done the same thing. And God knew it would happen before it did so that God might show to us the full extent of his love by the giving of his everything - his one and only Son. Indeed! In his eternal counsel and will he made it his purpose to reach out and provide rescue and restoration, a re-creation through the Word made flesh. And in this way we are given the greatest knowledge necessary to be his companions forever - the full extent of his love. The writer to the Hebrews says it in this way:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high . . . (Heb. 1:1-3).

When God wanted to express his love to us fully, he was not content to speak from heaven through inspired men. He sent his Son - the image of himself, the exact forever imprint of his nature, God of very God. The Word, the Son of God, became one of us, his expressive Word in the saving work of redemption just as he was God's expressive Word in the work of creation. This takes us to the heart of the Gospel

doesn't it? Not only is our Jesus the creator and sustainer of all things, but he is also the redeemer through the washing away of our sins by his blood on the cross. He is able to save what we have destroyed, and by his breath, everything is made new.

**The Word During Advent** is the wondrous truth that in the person of His Son, God is in the Christmas manger, born of woman to be our Savior. It says that God walked the paths of Palestine and the streets of its cities as he called his people to "repent and believe the good news (Mark 1:15)." As Paul writes, "in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself" through the cross. It assures us that the Son of God, he who became one of us, shared our human experience of death and overcame it in order that we might have life! It proclaims that he rose from the dead in victory, and now he rules all things as God's right-hand man, the conqueror of death and hell. As it says in our epistle lesson, "After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." That means that Jesus, one of us, rules all things for his people, that we may be his people and God may be our God and wipe every tear from our eyes!

When God expresses himself through the Word, his one and only Son, things happen. It happened in the creation when God said, "Let there be . . ." It happened in redemption when the Word became flesh and made himself "the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2)." It will happen when Jesus visibly returns in glory to judge the living and the dead and takes us home to be with him forever. On this first Sunday in Advent, we have heard from the Word of God. He speaks to us. And soon he will speak to us most intimately in the Sacrament of his body and blood for the forgiveness of all our sins. When he speaks, are you listening? May God grant us ears to hear, and hearts and lives to follow!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott