

For the people of St. Philip's
C Christmas I
Maria Hoecker, preacher
Trying to find the right word
John 1.1-14

In this time between Christmas and New Year's Day I've had a little bit of time to read some of the great books I received for Christmas. If you've ever had a chance to sit in my office you can see by my wall of books that I have no shortage of words surrounding me. I have just as many at the house, bookshelves surround my living space. Rick and I used to own a bookstore in Atchison KS very similar to Highland Books. Whenever I read my favorite authors and I am always humbled and amazed at how well they put their thoughts into words. Some people just have a way with words.

We're not gifted in that way. I wonder if you ever get lost for words? I do. That may surprise you, but it's true - preachers often get lost for words. Words are illusive and loaded with levels of meaning. Sometimes I wonder if it's all been said. But there's nothing like the ol' predictable Sunday morning deadline to force one to squeak something out.

When someone we know has just suffered a great loss, or has been made to feel insignificant or has some other piece of bad news, we all know that it's hard to find the right thing to say to them when we see them. That's normal. Or when something wonderful happens, which breaks through the mundane busyness of everyday life, like a marriage proposal or a birth, we are speechless with our immense joy. If you're like me I think of something great to say a couple of days later, or I write it out and wish I could have thought of it sooner.

But still, something compels us to speak to our experience. To tell others how we feel.
If I love you, how do you know it, unless I tell you?
If I love you, how will I really know if the love is returned, unless I tell you?
It is when we speak of what is inside of us that it becomes known.

When we speak of what is inside us, our feelings, our thoughts, our instincts, come alive. When we speak of what is inside us, our words become flesh, as we - and those to whom we speak - discover who we are.

When we speak of what is inside us, lights come on in our head and our heart - because we've found the right words. Suddenly we know ourselves more clearly, and we know that the folks we're around know us more clearly too. There's some risk involved in describing ourselves to others, in naming our experience, but somehow we're compelled to tell our unique story.

Well, that's how it is with God. Think back to the story of creation in Genesis. We are reminded that God was unknown before the Word was spoken. God had to find a Word to speak out in order to be able to create a beginning. God said, 'let there be light'. And then - there was light. The word was there all the time, but we couldn't see it until we heard it.

There's a neat story told in a movie documentary that I watched recently. This story is a bit of a legend I suspect, but it really makes an important point. It is said that when the three ships that brought Columbus and crew to the New World appeared on the horizon, the natives on the coast could not see the ships even though the ships were in plain view. All they could see were ripples on the water where the ships were. But because they did not have words or an experience of ships, they could not actually see those ships.

The ripples on the water caught the attention of the shaman, the holy one of the tribe, he could sense that something large was looming. He stared and stared at the waves caused by the approaching ships and gradually he was able to see the ships, in seeing the ships he put words to their description and was able to communicate those words to the rest of the tribe. Once they heard the words, they were able to see the approaching ships. And the rest is history. Something large was looming indeed.

It's a bit like when any of us say 'I love you' to someone, then that love exists, it's a big deal. Where before there was only an ambiguous silence. When God said 'Let there be light', there was light, where before there was only a brooding darkness. Until God gave us the Word for Light, we could not see the Light, even though the Word for Light has been there from the very beginning.

God has always had to find the right Word to speak out so as to continue to create new beginnings throughout time,

today, and beyond. Without God's words, we cannot see what is right in front of us.

The Word was with God, and the Word was God', writes John. And throughout time, God has been trying to get this Word across. We know from the story of time which we call The Bible, that God has been searching since the beginning for the right Word to get across to us who God is. It has been a struggle - for God to find the right Word to describe God to us; and for us to hear and receive it.

For the Word to come alive to us we have to listen for it. And when we hear it we make it come alive in our lives. 'The Word became flesh', John said.

At Christmas we are reminded what flesh he means. In the flesh of a man in history, Jesus, God finally manages to fully express who God is and what being fully human is all about.

In that life, and death, and new life, God's previously unspoken Word finally, finally reaches us.

So here we are this morning, waiting for God's great Word to come to us again, listening closely for it, waiting for it to be revealed to us yet again in all its love and all its glory and all the wonderful healing it brings.

That word is Jesus Christ - God's most perfect and most precious Word. Jesus - the Word became flesh and lived, and *lives* among us.

By coming together today we draw nearer to the Word. In you, in each of us, God's Word lives on. Soon we will leave this sacred space, returning to our world of risk and suffering, but we leave transformed, for we take God's Word with us. Every time we gather, every time we turn to scripture, every time we turn to prayer, God puts words to those unspeakable ripples we see out on the horizon. We can't see the ships that approach, we just notice there's some ripples in the water. God gives words to that which we can not see. As it says in the hymn Amazing Grace "I once was lost, but now I'm found, Twas blind, but now I see."

No one has ever seen God, it is Jesus Christ, who makes God's saving love known to us. *Through* grace upon grace, we all have received this living Word. *With* grace upon grace we can go out and tell others what we've come to see, like the shaman describing the approaching ships to those who couldn't see what was right in front of them. Jesus Christ brings light to our darkness, he gives us words for our blind spots.

Through the Word made flesh, we too *can* go out and tell others what they may not be able to see. There's a Light that shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it. Jesus Christ is our Light. "*I once was lost, but now I'm found, Twas blind but now I see.*"