



God Gave God's Word

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Have you ever witnessed a circumstance attentive to what is being said, when you heard something not intended by the speaker, and you came to a brilliant idea never before expressed? Last week, The Gospel of John described "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God", Our Call to Worship affirmed "The very WORD of GOD came to earth" and our Prayer of Confession named "You have given us your Word and we do not notice". All of which was exceedingly appropriate. BUT in all my life as a Christian, in 37 years of ordained ministry, suddenly what occurred to me was "GOD GAVE GOD'S WORD". The Gospels describe the Messiah as WORD, LIGHT, TRUTH, BREAD, VINE, SHEPHERD, EMMANUEL, the Christ is that WORD OF GOD SENT TO US; however the Act of "GIVING YOUR WORD" also has an entirely different context, that when we GIVE OUR WORD, we are making a Covenant Commitment, a Bond, a Statement of our Integrity.

When God created the Heavens and the Earth, God blessed Creation CALLED IT GOOD and VERY GOOD. When Noah had endured 40 Day Flood, God GAVE GOD'S WORD never again to destroy the Earth by flood. When David desired to build a House for God, God Covenanted a future for Israel through David's lineage. In like manner, when God gave God's Only Begotten Son to us, and at Jesus' Baptism by John in the Jordan God said "I AM WELL PLEASED" these are GOD'S PROMISE: GOD GAVE GOD'S WORD to us in Jesus Christ. Jesus is GOD'S RENEWED COMMITMENT to US, and the Gospels then describe Fully Divine/Fully Human Jesus living out a New and Different Human Commitment to God, a new REVERENCE FOR GOD.

At the opening words of Genesis there is an almost PAGAN description of this formless shadowed chaos of Earth and Water erupting wildly, contrasted by the Spirit of GOD BROODING over the face of the waters. Throughout much of the Bible, when God speaks, we expect the Voice of God to be larger than our reality. God speaks calling the Light of Day into being, separate from the darkness of shadows, space and night. God commands Waters and Dry lands to separate forming Oceans, Mountains, Lakes, Plains, Deserts. Moses went to receive God's Commandments and people were terrified by Fire, Thunder, Earth-quaking. My point is that the difference in the OLD & NEW TESTAMENTS is not so simplistic as the First Testament was about a God of ANGER and the New testament a God of LOVE; or a GOD of COMMANDMENTS versus a God of FORGIVENESS. But that there is a contrast from the CREATOR of the COSMOS, THE RULER of ALL NATURE, our attention being drawn to what happens to THE NATIONS through KINGS and PROPHETS; versus the Intimacy of GOD and The very first human living in a Reverent Relationship of absolute TRUST.

The earliest of the Gospels: Mark does not begin with a STABLE or SHEPHERDS ANGELS or STARS. When Jesus went into the Jordan to be Baptized this was reminiscent of the SPIRIT embracing the waters of chaos, but in Jesus. When Jesus went down under the water and came up, I question whether the VOICE of GOD thundered "YOU ARE MY BELOVED SON" for all the world to HEAR & KNOW. Instead, What I envision was GOD'S REVERENT ACCEPTANCE: "You are my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." Throughout the Old Testament you can sense GOD's frustration with Humankind! Creation was created to love God, but Eve and Adam went after what delighted the eye, Cain killed his

brother, in the time of Noah much of the world was corrupt, God began again with Abraham, then Moses, then David, finally sending Israel into Exile, followed by Redemption. The New Testament begins anew with GOD CLAIMING JESUS in BAPTISM.

How many of us were Baptized as Infants? There is a beauty to infant Baptism, that before we could reason, before we could choose or consciously do or say anything, We Were CHOSEN, we receive the gift of Baptism. This becomes the parents, grandparents, community wrapping our arms around this person, in affirmation that it DOES take a Village to raise a Child, and we this faith community will be that Village. As a RIGHT OF PASSAGE, when children reach an age of choosing for themselves there has been a CONFIRMATION, in which we affirm "YES, I WANT THIS FOR MYSELF."

Perhaps it was my own lack of self-esteem or fears, but I recall that as a year of wondering "WILL I PASS? DOES THE SESSION BELIEVE I AM MATURE ENOUGH TO BE AN ADULT? Will they want me?" In all of Church History, there has not been single a case of a Faith Community rejecting anyone, because BAPTISM is about ACCEPTANCE, CLAIMING BEFORE GOD.

Believer Baptism has a different emphasis for the Believer. As Adults we are no longer so innocent or naïve and we are choosing for ourselves. Recognizing all that we have known and experienced, do we choose to live differently, to live as those to whom GOD GAVE GOD'S WORD? Until the late 1990s, in the Presbyterian Church I had never witnessed an Adult Baptism. Prior to the 1950s, Morality and Mortality being what they were in North America, the norm had been that when a couple fell in love they got married and when they gave birth, the child was Baptized. There have been times in the United States when it was difficult to distinguish between being an American and being a Christian! Perhaps because in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, we in N. America no longer assumed every infant had to be baptized, on average once a year from the 1990s onward, we had new SEEKERS/Adult Believers who had not previously received the Sacrament. HOWEVER, whether as Infant or Adult Believer, The Sacrament of Baptism is GOD GIVING GOD'S WORD of Reverent Acceptance: You are loved, You are claimed by God and this community.

One man I Baptized as an Adult compared his Baptism to THE ACT OF PARACHUTING. All your life you have known tangibles within your control, but you know there is something more to life. There is a moment's hesitation before you leap out of the plane, before being Baptized when you question and doubt and fear; but leaping into the heavens all you can do is to TRUST and BELIEVE GOD will take care of you.

With our Sacrament of Infant Baptism, there is an emphasis on Naming, as if to proclaim to the world "THIS IS your Identity." However while Baptism is an act of naming, of claiming Christian identity, what is being emphasized in Jesus' Baptism is REVERENT ACCEPTANCE. God GIVES GOD'S WORD, a pledge of God's Integrity that our Boundaries have been changed: you belong to God through Jesus Christ. ACCEPTANCE seems such a simple ordinary thing; yet how much of our lives are we seeking simply to be Accepted for who we are? Not as awkward or strange, not for our parents, or money, but accepted for who we are gray hair and all. Throughout today, I have tried to emphasize a REVERENT ACCEPTANCE, which is not simply TOLLERENCE, but a Statement about Boundaries and Limitations.

The Ancient Celts of Ireland and Scotland believed there were sacred places here on Earth, they called THIN PLACES, where Heaven and Earth were so close they almost touch. What happened at Jesus Birth was God RIPPING OPEN one of those thin places to enter into our lives with us in Jesus Christ. EVER-AFTER the limitation the Boundary between Heaven and Earth, between Humanity and God was changed. I ache at what happened this week, as a MOB of Protestors RIOTED pushing passed barriers, passed Police, to mount the steps of the Capitol and walk through the Rotunda of Statues to our Presidents. To me it feels

as though THE GATES OF HELL, the BARRIERS TO CHAOS were ripped open. Just like the Heavens being OPENED, we cannot simply close the door. We can carry on, we can redouble our efforts, but we cannot undo what was done to the HUMAN LIMIT that violated what once was sacred.

In 1972 a madman went into St. Peter's Basilica and used a Hammer to attack Michelangelo's Marble Statue of Mary holding the Body of Christ called PIETA. Yesterday felt like that same violence, that chaos. The marble cannot be put back together, the sanctity of our Nation's Congress was violated. People demonstrated a complete lack of REVERENCE. Reverence is a deep understanding of human limitation. In the isolation of the last several months, being fed fears and anxiety, humanity became fatigued, tired of what we had and feeling denied, we began to believe there are no limitations for us. What we need now is a Renewal of Reverence, of AWE. Reverence is the virtue that keeps us from claiming we are god and there is no other. More than a theological statement about cleansing from Original Sin, the fact that each of the four Gospels include Jesus' Baptism is a claim of REVERENCE at the beginning, that Jesus never claimed to be equal with God. For Jesus, it was enough to be LOVED BY GOD, to be CLAIMED, to be ACCEPTED BY GOD, and all of that Because GOD GAVE GOD'S WORD!

Recently I was told the story of when someone from our congregation visited their daughter's family. One Sunday afternoon, the grandchildren were far too quiet. You know there is a problem, when the grandchildren are too quiet. Searching, the grandmother heard the toilet flushing repeatedly. The Grandmother went toward the sound and peeking through the door to the bathroom saw her grandchildren, one holding a Barbie upside down, one holding a GI Joe by his feet, as the third grandchild quietly pronounced "In the Name of the father and in the Name of the Son down in the HOLE you go!" As the toys were immersed and flushed. The story reminded me of ALICE FALLING DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE. It is not enough that we have our children Baptized, or made certain our grandchildren were Baptized. We need to explain and remind one another over and over what it means to be Reverent practicing CLAIMING, ACCEPTANCE, LOVE and the Integrity of GIVING OUR WORD.

When I came to look for a house here in Green Valley, I stayed at a local motel and in the Lobby bought a signed phot of President Ronald Reagan. The photo bears his quote:

"FREEDOM IS A FRAGILE THING, AND NEVER MORE THAN ONE GENERATION AWAY FROM EXTINCTION. IT IS NOT OURS BY INHERITANCE; IT MUST BE FOUGHT FOR AND DEFENDED CONSTANTLY BY EACH GENERATION, FOR IT COMES ONLY ONCE TO A PEOPLE. THOSE WHO HAVE KNOWN FREEDOM AND THEN LOST IT HAVE NEVER KNOWN IT AGAIN."