

SERMON: 5 January 2020 – Rev Alistair Cowper

**“It’s good to be human”
(Ephesians 1:3-14 and John 1:10-18)**

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

In the beginning was the Word.

Both the Hebrew Bible, our OT, and the Greek New Testament begin in similar manner.

God is there in the beginning.

The Word is there in the beginning.

God is the Word and the Word is God.

Speaking words is a very human thing to do. It’s good to be human.

Words can create. Think about the beginning of creation, “and God said, let there be light, and there was light.”

God and Word are together in a creative unity. God speaks creation into being.

And God has made human beings in God’s image, with the power of speech, to create new worlds.

The Word becoming flesh and dwelling as a perfect human expression in Jesus confirms that humanness is good. Humanness is God intended. From the very beginning.

And humanness is endowed with the purpose and potential to create further goodness.

You and I have the capacity to create and do great things. Because God has made us that way. And because of the incarnation, God is with us.

Jesus of Nazareth was the first and fullest embodiment of what this means.

The Gospel writer John makes it clear that the Word becoming flesh is Jesus who is the Christ, the eternal Word of God; the most unique and perfect expression of what it is to be fully human.

He, Jesus, God with us, has shown us what we will become as we remain in him, abide in his ways.

But these are concepts that are so mysterious to us they are really hard to understand.

Indeed, John tells us that 'although the world was made through the Word, the world didn't recognise him when he came' (1:10).

Sometimes we don't recognise God when God is there in front of us. We need wisdom from above to help us to recognise where God and where God is moving and working and leading us to be.

One thing the birth of Jesus tells us loudly is that God turns up in unexpected people at unexpected times and in unexpected places. And we might therefore often be surprised about where God is and begin to expect to see God in unfamiliar people, places and times.

John's gospel is different from the other gospels in speaking about the Word. We might ask why is it so different?

Well, one answer to that is that John is writing to a Greek speaking culture unfamiliar with Jewish history. Matthew and Luke have the Jewish genealogies. John doesn't.

Instead, John taps into an idea very familiar to Greek culture, which remember, is the world wide culture of the day, the means through which the good news is going to have to travel if it's going to reach the ends of the earth.

So, the good news needs to be translated into a language that people can understand.

(MAF film, "the end of the spear" showed that quite powerfully recently, how the missionaries had to learn the local language in order to translate and tell the good news in a way they could receive. And of course much of the success of that was the missionaries use of the universal language of God's love.)

It's worth thinking a wee bit about the Greek culture that John the disciple was working in, John's mission field.

"In Greek Stoic philosophy the idea of the word, began around 560 BCE, with the philosopher Heraclitus whose basic idea was that everything was in a constant state of flux.

Significantly, this change and flux was not haphazard, it was ordered and controlled, following a continuous pattern. This controlled pattern he attributes to the Logos, the Word, the reason of God.

Heraclitus believed that people had the ability to judge between right and wrong and had knowledge and the ability to reason, as the Logos of God dwelled within them.

So we see that John is writing into that Greek culture using language and concepts they already understand.

[The Spill the Beans material for this week challenges us with this comment on today's theme:]

"Maybe that is exactly what we should be encouraged to do this week: cut all the church talk, and talk in language that our culture understands and can relate to!

In the hope that people can discover the freedom to engage in a world that is in a constant state of flux.”

I really like the idea of accepting that the world is in a constant state of flux. Flux means fluidity and suggests movement towards a different state.

The dictionary actually defines it as a state of constant change.

And yes that's it. Everything is in a state of constant change. Everything is evolving towards a better, more complete state of being.

And that better state has been (and is being) revealed to us in Christ. Jesus is the perfect, everlasting, for all time, embodiment of the goodness of humanness. And we are called to continue that embodiment until all things are in Christ.

The NLT version describes verses we read from Ephesians 1 under the heading, “Christ, the eternal Word”.

There is so much theology in that chapter, you could preach on it forever and still feel like you were only ever scratching the surface. It truly is a mystery in so many ways.

Here's 3 major bullet points:

- Everything in creation belongs to Christ and is centred on Christ
- Even before God made the world, God loved everything and chose everything in Christ to be holy and faultless.
- God has showered his kindness, wisdom and understanding on everything, through the Holy Spirit.

So what does this mean for us at the start of this new decade?

We can expect and anticipate a life of “grace upon grace” (1:16) because grace and truth came about when the transcendent and eternal God decided to “pitch his tent” (1:14) among ordinary people like you and me, and dwell with us forever.

And when John's gospel talks about all those who receive Christ having the right to be born as children of God, it means that there is a continual rebirthing of grace and truth in our lives until every one of our lives become one with Christ.

This is the movement which we call the church and which is aptly described as the body of Christ growing to maturity and enlightening every one.

The Word is flesh and dwells among us and within us.