

He has made him known

John 1:1-18

January 14, 2007

What makes you a Christian, if you do consider yourself a Christian?

Is it your character or is it your faith? Are you a Christian because you try to be a good person, because you do the right thing, or are you a Christian because you are a person of faith, because you believe the right things?

Is it having faith or is it doing justice? Does the way you think make you a Christian or does the way you do your best to make a difference in the world make you a Christian?

Is it justice or is it witness? Is it mission or is it evangelism? Is being a Christian a matter of changing the world or of witnessing to the God who will change the world? Is it a matter of speaking a confrontational truth to the powers that be or a matter of bringing a healing truth to lost souls?

Is it witness or is it love? Does being a Christian mean being eager to tell your own story, or does it mean being eager to listen to other people's stories? Does it mean spreading good news, or does it mean spreading good will?

What makes you a Christian? Is being a Christian about character? Or is it about faith? Or about action? Or about witness? Or about love?

I say it's about none of these things! Being a Christian is, first and foremost, about knowing God. Not just knowing something about a God other people talk about, but knowing God. Not just believing in God in a general sense, believing in the idea of "God," but knowing God. Not just acknowledging that there must be Someone out there watching over you, but knowing God! When you know God, the living God, the God who is, even a little bit, all the rest will follow ... character and belief and action and witness and love.

So the critical question for us is this: *How can we know God?* We can't see God, we don't hear God speak, so how can we know God? The gospel of John is written as an answer to just that question.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... (or translating the last phrase literally: God was the Word)

From the beginning God is, and from the beginning God is Word. From the beginning God is word, speech, expression, communication, revelation. From the beginning what God is and what God does is meaningful, expressible, knowable. From the beginning God is knowable.

In the beginning was the Word ...

John doesn't say: *In the beginning was An Awesome Power* or *In the beginning was An Infinite Being* or *In the beginning was An Irresistible Force*.

In the beginning was the Word, and the word was the source of life, and this life brought light to humanity ...

Word and light. These are words that imply meaning, understanding, perception, interpretation, knowledge. From the beginning humanity is not in the dark. From the beginning humanity is not clueless. From the beginning humanity is not ignorant.

The world is surely full of darkness and ignorance and uncertainty and mystery, but we can see, we can know.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out

God is Word. God intends us to know. God intends us to know him.

But how? The question still remains: how?

There are different ways, many ways, that something about God can be known. We can know something about God by looking out, by studying the natural universe in its broadest sweep or in its tiniest detail. We can know something about God by looking in, by studying the habits and desires, the power and the fragility, of our own hearts and minds. We can know something about God when God the Word chooses to speak to people and through people. As the writer of the letter to the Hebrews put it: *in the past God spoke to our ancestors many times and in many ways through the prophets.*

But John is not interested in the many times and the many ways. John is interested in just one time and in just one way:

The Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth

The Word became flesh! How astonishing! How outrageous! How unthinkable! How impossible! How wonderful! How astonishing and how wonderful to think that God's expression, God's self-expression, God's intention, God's desire, God's will, God's self becomes flesh!

From the beginning what God is and what God does is Word, and John declares this Word became flesh, became a human being like us, and lived among us.

He lived among us, full of grace and truth ...

How could the Word, the revelation of God, the manifestation of who God is in the flesh, be filled with anything else? Of course, he would be full of grace and truth! Of course he would be kind and generous and forgiving, and honest and plain and just. Of course he would be gentle and persistent, understanding and unrelenting, comforting and challenging.

But that's just the point. We know what God is like, we know God, by looking at Jesus. Because Jesus lived among us, because we saw the grace and truth that filled his life, the grace and truth that defined his relationships with each and every other human being, we know what God is like. The grace and truth that filled Jesus' life point to a God who is filled with grace and truth.

No one has ever seen God, [but] the only Son, who is the same as God -- the one who is the Word, the word made flesh, the one called Jesus -- he has made him known ...

This is the constant theme of the gospel of John: *He has made him known.* Jesus has made God known. Jesus is the Revealer, revealing to humanity the mind and heart and will of God. Jesus is the living Word, the one through whom, the one in whom, we can know God, and in knowing God be transformed, or better, be re-formed as the creatures God made us to be.

What makes you a Christian? Knowing God. And when you know Jesus, you know God! May our reading of John's gospel together over these next several months give us opportunity to get to know Jesus better, as he was and as he is!