

7th Feb - Crying out to God. John 1 - 1-14

This is the prologue to John's gospel, and the first 3 words are supposed to remind us deliberately of the first words of the creation story in Genesis - in the Beginning - this is about Creation.

In Genesis - God spoke - and the world was created

In John - we're told that at that time, when or before, the world was created - The Word was there.

The Word is John's Code name for Jesus, and in Greek, its LOGOS - where we got logic from.

The Word - Logos - in Greek - has caused no end of writing and scholarly head scratching.

For Heraclitus (ancient greek - 500BC) - Logos is the omnipresent wisdom by which all things are steered

For Stoics - it is the common law of nature, immanent in the universe, the divine fire

For Philo - it was the agent of creation - the thought of God when it is expressed

For him - Logos was the means by which man may know God

You can see that John would have thought that a great way to let people know who Jesus was in a language they understood. We do the same when we call Jesus a king, or God a father - we are grasping at words which mean something to us, to say something about Jesus or God - because really our words aren't enough.

But the Greeks had this idea of the essence of life, the driving force of the universe, the way you could see the hand of God in a way.

But John chose this word carefully - because it speaks not just to the Greek philosophers and their followers in the Roman Empire, it also resonated with the Jews.

In the Hebrew Bible, speaking is putting thoughts into action. So when God speaks - he's not just saying something, his words accomplish what they say. The word of God is an action.

So in Ps 33 - by the *word* of the Lord the heavens were made.

Or in Genesis - God spake - and it was so.

So what if we put those together - that God spake, and his voice, as it were, was Jesus?

Colossians tell us the universe was made for Christ and by Christ. The church believes that Jesus is the voice of God - the Word of God.

The confusion comes when we see that the Torah, is also called God's Word - the Law of God is seen as expressing God's thought. And of course we often call the New Testament - the Word of God.

And so our lovely English language seems not to be subtle enough to express these 2 different types of Word - a written guide, which expresses thoughts, and a living Word - a divine being who is the agent of creation

Which do you think Hebrew 3 is talking about?

*For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

Who judges but Jesus? Who can see our innermost thoughts? To whom do we give account? Jesus.

So John's gospel starts with this amazing claim - that Jesus was there before Creation - always pre-existent - with God and in God - and by him was everything made.

-----

So Jesus is the voice of God - crying out and creating the world in the process.

And I wanted to think about our voice, and our crying out.

You know - if I don't speak, you don't know what I'm thinking (and let me clarify that sign language is a language, a voice too). What I mean is that we have to transfer the chemical reactions in our brain into physical movements - our arms and hands in sign language, but our vocal chord, tongues, lips and our lungs, diaphragms and our breath. Of course in Hebrew the breathe is the life - that's why man is not alive in Gen 2 until God breathes in him. So when we speak - we use our energy, our breath. We have to make an effort, if we want to be heard - a word that also means understood.

If Jesus had never spoken, we wouldn't know what he thought. We wouldn't have the parables, or the beatitudes, or the teaching on how to pray. If he hadn't put in the effort.

And sometimes he's not just speaking - he cries out - at the tomb of Lazarus - Lazarus come out!  
At the feast of tabernacles- if anyone is thirsty, let them come to me!  
And of course on the cross - My God, why have you forsaken me?

This crying out - its about really letting others know what's going on inside. Its making sure that they know, not just what you're thinking, but what you're feeling!

Think of that great groan at a football match when there's a near miss on the goal?  
Think of the armies of old running into battle screaming - out of fear and terror and to instil fear in the enemy.

Perhaps crying out is the most expressive way we have as humans of communicating. The deepest way.

And it has a long history in the Bible

After Cain murders his brother Abel - the ground cries out to God for justice.  
Which reminds us of Palm Sunday when Jesus says - if you silence the children the very stones will cry out.

When the slaves are building pyramids for Pharaoh in Egypt, they cry out to God - and God hears them and sends Moses.  
And when they stand on the bank of the Red Sea Moses cries out - and it is parted  
And when there's no water in the wilderness, Moses cries out again

Think of the Psalms -  
"The righteous cry, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles" (Psalm 34:17).  
"When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me" (Psalm 56:9).

Oh and there's Elijah crying out when he prays for the widow's son  
And on into the new testament Paul cry's out in prayer

So many times, when people are desperate - they cry out to God,

They express themselves in the strongest possible way to communicate with God.

And yet sometimes when we pray, we sit in silence.

We're happy to bring our silent prayers to God - no problem with that - Be still and know that I am god

Sometimes we say words - quietly, calmly, dear God please look after my family, bless our church.  
Nothing wrong with that - Jesus tells us not to babble on the like the pagans - simply ask, he says.

Yet what I notice is that its when I'm really worked up, upset, when I cry out, that I see prayers answered.

For a long time I wasn't sure of the connection - if it was just because I was looking for an answer for a desperate situation that I saw God give an answer. Yet looking at the Bible I think that's not it - I think that our desperation is somehow a key. After all, a parent may put off their child asking for an ice cream while they just say - daddy can I have an ice cream? But when that child starts to cry - its harder to ignore! And I'm not advocating bad parenting - give in to a tantrum! I'm saying imagine if your child were in pain, asking for help - of course you would help. When we cry out to God, his heart is moved - he sees his lovely children and he cries with us - Jesus wept at Lazarus grave.

So let me join this thought about crying out and Jesus being God's living Word, to our current situation with the virus.

Because in the old testament, when disasters happen, there is a universal reaction - doesn't mater if its when the flood comes, or when there's famine, or when the people face overwhelming odds in battle, or the people of Ninenevah - they all do the same thing. And what's weird, or strange - is that its what people have done all over the world, for most of humanity's history - and yet we don't do it now.

People used to cry out to God. To cry out - that most primal expression - to God - who is the only one bigger than the disaster, the only one whose agency, whose WORD might save and help them.

I mentioned this at the start of the pandemic - that for once the modern world was thrown back into helplessness - because money won't make it go away, and our science is trying but its not got all the answers, and all the power that companies and nations have - can't stop it.

For a while I thought maybe I was happily proved wrong, we had got it beat, and we could all go back to normal - but it seems that's not so - and I don't think its just the February blues talking. Arguments over vaccines, new variants springing up, the problem that no country is safe until the whole world is safe - these things are not going away over night.

We need to cry out to God. Don't get me wrong - I'm not saying we need to go all primitive and start offering sacrifices to God, or get all magical that I expect God to send a rainbow and we'll wake up and it will be gone. I expect God to work through humans - through scientists and politicians and premier league footballers (especially them). But I think its time for us to stop just wishing it would go away, or whispering it, it is time to cry out, to use our voices - God make this stop! God take away this virus!

We need to put more energy, more effort in - and I think we should be praying for God's help, wisdom, inspiration. We need to pray for building it back better, as the phrase goes - we need to make society more equal and fair, where we care for creation.

The thing is, I'm not really that emotionally out there, demonstrable - I'm not American! Someone in a church I was in invited me to join "the holy weepers" - we cry over the land Simon! It was a big turn off for me! But then, if we're not desperate about what's happening, why would God think we care? Do we care? Then lets tell God that. Lets use our voices, our Word. Truly, it might not go away unless we do.

And finally I found out another thing - you had the Greek word Logos at the start, well do you know what the greek word is in the bible for the holy spirit? - all through the new testament, its not called Hagios Sophia - which is holy spirit - the word the writers chose was - the Paraclete. I know it sounds like something you'd use when ice climbing - but do you know what Paraclete means -

**- the one who answers the cry.**

How about that? - Why don't we cry out to God, and see who God sends?

In this darkest night, God will give us strength, and one another, and kindle the flame of hope - and our faith will be reignited when he answers our cry.