

John 1.1-14; Proverbs 8.1,22-31; Ps.104.26-end; Col. 1.15-20
8:00 & 10:00 am - 2 before Lent; 8.2.15 - St. A's, Totteridge

Grant, O God, that in the written word, & thru' the spoken word, we may behold the living Word, our Lord & Saviour Jesus Christ.

The opening to the gospel of John, written approx. 70 AD, is surely one of the most extraordinary, all-encompassing, and beautifully written passages in all scripture. The first paragraph is 'nutshell' theology, astonishing in its economy of words, infinitely complex in the enormity of meaning - it repays closer examination, so please bear with me.

We hear about this thing called 'The Word' (Gk: *logos*), that it was God (i.e. divine). Next, that 'He' ('it' is given gender) was in the beginning with God. So, all at once, 'the Word' is separately identifiable as 'The Word', 'with God', 'is God', that 'it'

is male, and that all things, specifically 'Life', came into being through him and in him. This 'Life' is the light that shines in all people, inc. you and me, and that shines in the darkness, implying that light and dark co-exist or, that darkness is just the absence of light.

And then, we hear about John the Baptist, someone who commanded a large following in early Christianity but, just in case there was any confusion, John the Evangelist makes it clear that the Baptist is a solely a witness to Christ, the light of the world.

And then we hear that Christ brought the world into being. As the incarnation of God in this dimension, he must also be

the means by which this dimension came into existence, perhaps the one who, with the personification of ultimate Wisdom, as described in the Book of Proverbs (8:30), beside him, ignited the big bang.

From this we may conclude that there are a number of dimensions, or aspects, to God. That he is a 'paradox of simultaneous unity and distinction' (Countryman), all of which would lead eventually and quite naturally to the formulation of a doctrine of the Holy Trinity. One God made up of the Father we *cannot* see, the Son whom *was* seen and who as God's Word also brought us God's 'Word', and the Holy Spirit that moves between them, a bearer of God's grace, bringing and sustaining all life on earth.

These ideas are probably developments of ideas contained in Paul's letter to the Colossians 15-20 concerning the supremacy of Christ, believed to have been written whilst Paul was imprisoned at Ephesus in the years 53-4 (see 1 Cor.15:32 & 2 Cor.1:8), in other words, some 20 years before the likely date of John's gospel. In Colossians, Paul describes a Christ that is ['the image of the invisible God ...in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible ...all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.](#)

So how is this relevant for us today? The section of Proverbs I mentioned earlier was probably written in the post-exilic period (586-332 BCE) as a teaching aid for the surpassing value of wise living, for humans in general and young people

in particular. She, for in the ancient world wisdom was always feminine, is present before creation and at creation; she takes priority over the created world and actively participated in its design and construction. Her precedence over the 'things' of life is a teaching against materialism, something mankind has usually had a problem with. Wisdom, and the knowledge of God at whose side she works, is a prerequisite for well-being, and I'm sure most of us would agree that this is very much still so today.

Paul too, reminds us that the world is made for God through the agency of Christ, and only for us when we seek to do his will. Humanity suffers like a plant cut from its roots if we don't accept that we live and breath and have our being only at God's behest, that we are in God, for God, and sustained by God through Christ. To think otherwise is to make unwise and dangerous assumptions, for nothing can hold together for long if it cuts itself off from its only means of access to sustenance.

And John's gospel completes the picture, gathering together the wisdom of the centuries to offer us the amazing news that God, the Creator of all, came amongst us in Christ to tell us how things really are, to bring us his Word, his life and his Spirit, a never-ending source of nourishment and hope that nothing can ever destroy. Evelyn Underhill says that,

'Behind the words of the Fourth Gospel there seems to lie one of the most complete of all experiences of the limitless "Kingdom of Heaven": an experience not only of new

birth, of struggle, of attainment, but of that high permanent life of union, that impassioned and loving self-emergence in the universal life, in which the "new creature" feels himself to be a "branch" of the great tree which life is building up: humble yet exalted; though finite, a partaker of the Infinite; energized, not by his own separate strength, but by the sap which flows through the Whole'.

Evelyn Underhill

Spoken in the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit. Amen.

John 1.1-14 The Word Became Flesh

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Proverbs 8.1,22-31 The Gifts of Wisdom

8

Does not wisdom call,
and does not understanding raise her voice?

Wisdom's Part in Creation

- ²² The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.
- ²³ Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
- ²⁴ When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
- ²⁵ Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth—
- ²⁶ when he had not yet made earth and fields,
or the world's first bits of soil.
- ²⁷ When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
- ²⁸ when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
- ²⁹ when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
- ³⁰ then I was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
- ³¹ rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.
- ²⁶ There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

²⁷ These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;
²⁸ when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good
things.
²⁹ When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.
³⁰ When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.

³¹ May the glory of the Lord endure for ever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works—
³² who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke.
³³ I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
³⁴ May my meditation be pleasing to him,
for I rejoice in the Lord.
³⁵ Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
and let the wicked be no more.
Bless the Lord, O my soul.
Praise the Lord!

Colossians 1.15-20

The Supremacy of Christ

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

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