

“At a Loss”
John 1:1-14
December 24, 2019

If this world is at a loss for anything, it can hardly be at a loss for words. Countless acres of trees are cut down every single day to produce the newspapers that are read for less than an hour, then burned - not to speak of the billions of pixels created for blogs, chatrooms, Kindle readers, and other digital communications. Millions of dollars are spent each day on news broadcasts on radio, TV, and internet podcasts, while late into the night millions watch talk shows. Textbooks are produced every year for our schools and universities, pulpy paperbacks of escapist literature fill our bookshelves, and world leaders solemnly offer their own versions of propaganda for whoever is gullible enough to listen to them.

Our government alone prints millions of pages of regulations from the bureaucracy each year. The Congressional Record fills hundreds if not thousands of pages each day, and political campaigns offer position papers on everything from soybean subsidies to how we can stem the rising tide of imports.

No, we are not at a loss for words! Yet with all the media competing for our attention, all the fast talkers competing for our votes, and all the advertisers endeavoring to separate us from our dollars, is it any wonder that though our ears seem full, we feel empty? That though we have much to choose from, we are at a loss for making decisions? And that after enduring the Muzak in the stores, the ringing bells on the street corners, and the shouts of drivers yelling at each other over a parking space - is there any wonder that we seek not words, but quiet; not sound, but silence; not noise, but peace?

No, we are not a loss for words! We use words to manipulate, to cajole, to negotiate, to argue, to insult and occasionally even to inspire, to express love, to console, to encourage. And yet even though they seem so useful, words - mere words - can often seem entirely devoid of meaning, mere wisps of sound that go in one ear, and out the other. Some words we speak so automatically - without even thinking - that a curse can

pass our lips before we even realize it. And too many of us will deny the truth readily if the truth will reflect badly on us, while we take credit even when no credit is due us.

No, we are not at a loss for words. And yet, in the end, what do they achieve for us? The Apostle Paul puts the sound of our mouths in perspective when he writes in I Corinthians, "Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease." And even Paul does not begin to approach the pessimism of King Solomon, who wrote in Ecclesiastes that all is vanity - our labors, our lives, and certainly our words.

And yet we pay so much attention to the sounds of our own voices, delighting in the earthquake, wind, and fire which come alive in our verbal controversies, our oral arguments, and the silent words of our own hearts as we consider vengeance, plot, conspiracy, and counter-plot.

No, we are NOT at a loss for words.

Yet in all the noisomeness, the din, the clamor of our speaking in tongues, there is one Word which our human race too often overlooks. In the imagination of our own hearts, there is one Word which we all too often fail to seriously consider. Those who have ears to hear are few indeed, when it comes to the still, small voice uttering the Word, the Name, of salvation.

It is a Word that has echoed through the centuries, and has been repeated many times as long as there have been people on our planet. Yet many have ignored its sound, many have failed to listen, and have babbled on in their own way, failing to appreciate that in one single, solitary Word - a Word made flesh - everything that needs expressing is expressed, everything that needs attention is focused upon, everything that must exist, lives.

This Word was present at the beginning of creation, a creation that was deemed Good by the Source of all goodness. This Word carries within it the seeds of life itself, and all that is necessary to the growth of that life. This Word has the power to cut to the

quick, to separate the wheat from the chaff, to penetrate to the very depths of our being. It has the power to renew, restore, re-form us - to bring us face to face with who we really are, and what we should really become. Perhaps it is no wonder that many do not wish to hear this Word, for it speaks of judgment as well as compassion, justice as well as mercy.

Yet it is the Word that our world so desperately needs. It is the sound which our souls ache to hear without even really knowing what we are yearning for. It is the voice that carries within itself both thunder and tranquillity, lightning and peace. Yet it seems that people would rather fill their ears with ceaseless babblings, almost as if we were fearful of giving our lives true meaning, true purpose, true peace. It is as if we were trying to escape from all that is worthwhile in life - and then we curse the emptiness we find as a result.

Just as the sun rises each day, just as the seasons turn in the year, so too does the Word return relentlessly to haunt us every Advent season. Oh, yes - the Word can come to us at other times, even when we least expect it - in an act of kindness, a flash of insight, or in a memory glimpsed from ages past. But every year at this time, the Word presents Himself to all who have open hearts.

Some prepare for His coming, while others would render Him only momentary lipservice. Either way, the Word which comes to us demands a response - not our own pathetic words, but a response in the form of real deeds, living deeds, fleshed out, full-blooded. Indeed, the Word seeks to be made flesh once again, in a world that would rather talk about poverty than eradicate it, would rather argue about religion than live it, would rather debate the meaning of lovingkindness rather than bringing justice, truth, beauty, and righteousness into the lives of those who have suffered from our own injustices, our own perversions of the truth, our own self-righteousness.

How are we going to prepare for the coming of the Word? Many will mouth lame excuses, others will offer weak explanations as to why they cannot take that most serious of Words seriously. Many will roll it over their tongues a few times, and then go on their

way, looking for more fashionable sounds, more socially acceptable expressions, more up-to-date cliches or turns of phrase. Many won't have the time for it after the 25th of December, and even more will barely remember His Name after the New Year ... until maybe Thanksgiving time.

But the Word will still be spoken in the hearts and the lives of all who seek grace, of all who thirst after righteousness, of all who are merciful and seek the straight and narrow path of peace - God's peace. May the Word of God dwell in each of us richly, taking root in our very souls, grounded in love, and find expression in our efforts to be more Christlike during this Advent season, and during the whole of our lives.

Have a Merry Christmas.