

CHAPTER SIX: JESUS THE WORD OF GOD MADE FLESH

When the Scriptures speak of the 'Word of God', they are speaking of God as giving expression to God's will, to God's Self-revelation. In the dramatic account in the Book of Genesis it is the Word of God that brings creation into existence, beginning with the command: 'Let there be light' (Genesis 1:3). This is the Word of which Isaiah speaks: 'The Word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do' (Isaiah 55:11).

There is a close link between God's Wisdom and God's Word. The Wisdom of God is God as reflected in the beauty and order of creation, of history, of the Torah, and of Jesus. The Word of God is God as the sustaining cause of this beauty and this order. This theme is taken up in the opening verses of the Letter to the Hebrews: 'At various times in the past and in various different ways, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our own time, the last days, God has spoken to us through God's Son, the Son that God has appointed to inherit everything and through whom God made everything there is' (Hebrews 1:1-2).

The Scriptures speak of 'God's Wisdom', 'God's Presence', 'God's Spirit', 'God's Word'. When they personify the Wisdom of God, the Spirit of God, the Word of God, they are expressing their profound faith in the presence of God in their lives. God's Wisdom is God as wise. In the same way God's Word is God as declaring God's will and communicating God's being. We find, for example, in the Book of Wisdom: 'When peaceful silence lay over all, and night had run the half of her swift course, down from the heavens, from the royal throne, leapt your all-powerful Word carrying your command like a sharp sword' (Wisdom 18:14-15).

In the Prologue to his Gospel the Beloved Disciple personifies the 'Word' of God. Then in verse fourteen he identifies the personified Word with Jesus. This is brought out more clearly if, instead of translating the Greek pronoun with 'he', we repeat the noun 'Word'. In the following translation of the Prologue, each time the noun '*Word*' is used where the Greek has a pronoun, it is italicized.

'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was towards God and the Word was God. *The Word* was towards God in the beginning. By means of *the Word* all things came to be and nothing has come to be without *the Word*. That which came to be in *the Word* was life and that life was the light of mankind, a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower' (John 1:1-5).

We are taken back to the dawn of creation when God summoned creation into being, when light dispelled the darkness of primordial chaos. Creation reflected God and from the heart of creation a Word was addressed back to God. A dialogue was begun between God and creation. Creation experienced itself facing towards God, and drawn towards God as its goal.

The Word was the true light, which, coming into the world, enlightens all mankind. *The Word* was in the world and the world came into being by means of *the Word*, yet the world did not know *the Word*. *The Word* came to *the Word's* own domain and *the Word's* own people did not receive *the Word*. But to all who did receive *the Word* *the Word* gave power to become children of God. All who believe in the name of *the Word* were born not of

human stock, nor of earthly desire, nor of man's will, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld the glory of *the Word* full of grace and truth' (John 1:9-14).

The Word of God that found expression in creation and in history, in the Law (the Torah) and in the Prophets, the Word of God that was largely unheeded and rejected, finally 'became flesh'. God's Word is revealed in the flesh of the man Jesus of Nazareth. It was he who revealed to the Beloved Disciple and his contemporaries what God's Word had been revealing since the beginning of creation. The Word of God had sought a place in which to dwell, and had pitched a tent in Israel. Now finally the Word found a home in human flesh. This was the man Jesus whom the Beloved Disciple had known. The Glory of God could be seen in creation, in history, and in Israel. God was revealed in a human way in the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth. 'And we beheld him.' The Beloved Disciple experienced Jesus' love and came to believe that Jesus is full of God's love. Jesus is the one who speaks God's words of love to us, who takes us into the very heart of God, and reveals the covenant of love offered by God from the beginning. He reveals the faithfulness of God. He shows us the truth of God, revealing what God really is.

'From his fullness we have all received, yes, grace upon grace. The Law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus the Messiah. No one has ever seen God. The only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father has made God known' (John 1:16-18).

The conclusion brings the reader to the revelation that Jesus gave and continues to give us God. It prepares us for the Gospel in which Jesus gives this revelation, firstly in many signs, and finally when he is lifted up on the cross. This hymn to the Word expresses the main theme of the Gospel of the Beloved Disciple: Jesus is God's Word to us. Jesus is the revelation of God. The final verse leaves the reader with a picture of special intimacy. Just as the Beloved Disciple reclined in Jesus' bosom, so Jesus is 'in the bosom of the Father', resting against God's heart, in intimate communion, learning secrets never before revealed. It is Jesus who 'has made God known.'

Furthermore, however splendid was the gracious gift God gave us when God revealed God's will to us through Moses, this is but the background against which the revelation given in Jesus stands out in magnificent relief. In Jesus we see God's 'hesed we 'emet' ('grace and truth'), God's covenant love and fidelity. Jesus reveals the very being of God.

The hymn focuses our attention on the man Jesus in the weakness of his mortal state (in the 'flesh'). It is in his human frailty – in fact, as the Beloved Disciple mentions again and again, in his life-giving on the cross – that he reveals to us the radiant beauty of God.

A good commentary on the Prologue is the First Letter composed within the community of the Beloved Disciple: 'Something which has existed since the beginning, that we have heard, and we have seen with our own eyes; that we have watched and touched with our hands: the Word, who is life – this is our subject. That life was made visible: we saw it and we are giving our testimony, telling you of the eternal life which was with the Father and has been made visible to us' (1 John 1:1-4).

Jesus, the man known to the Beloved Disciple, is the incarnation, the realization of God in our human condition, the human embodiment of God who has been communicating God's Self through creation and through the history of Israel.

If we wish to see who Jesus is, we must start where his disciples started: with a human being. It is when, like the disciples, we watch him in prayer that we see and are drawn into his divinity, his intimate communion with God. To see God revealed we must 'look on the one whom they have pierced' (John 19:37). Jesus, who is the Word of God made flesh, is indeed 'flesh'. And he manifests the Glory of God, he reveals God's Wisdom, and he speaks God's Word of love, when he is lifted up on the cross. We are to watch him there to see revealed, not just the faithful love of a wonderful man. We are to see revealed there God's Wisdom; we are to hear there, clearly spoken, God's Word. Enlightened by those who knew and loved him, our gaze focuses on Jesus who enlightens, loves, liberates and saves the world. The way to come to know God who speaks God's Word, is to contemplate Jesus, the Word who is spoken: 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him' (Mark 9:7).