

Embracing Mystery

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

*The Word was in the beginning with God; all things were made through the Word,
and without the Word was not anything made that was made.*

In the Word was life, and the life was the light of all.

The light shines in the deepest night, and the night has not overcome it. (John 1: 1 – 5)

One summer, a friend visited us for a weekend. He went to the nearby Catholic church for Saturday afternoon Mass. When he returned in a surprisingly short amount of time, we inquired about his speedy sojourn. His reply: “Well, a retired priest was filling in. The Gospel reading was from John. When it came time for the homily, the priest said: ‘John wrote this Gospel when he was a very old man. When I am a very old man I hope to understand it. Until then, let’s move on!’”

I used to have much the same feeling about the Gospel of John. It seemed too full of mystery - and confusing sentence structures. I needed definitive interpretations of the seven signs and needed to fully unpack the seven “I Am” statements. I wanted something more straightforward, easier to read, like Mark’s Gospel.

Presently, however, I feel drawn to the mystery. The older I get, the less I know. Life does have more mystery, less certainty. There are no easy answers, and I am okay with more wondering.

Perhaps that is the power of this season. People attend Advent and Christmas Eve services to hear about the mystery: the mystery of hope in the midst of despair, love in the face of discord, peace where there is division and joy when things seem most bleak. Not to mention that God Most High comes to us in the form of an infant born lowly and in a manger. Nothing mysterious about that!

I would like to write about how embracing the mystery helps us to be extra faithful, or increase worship attendance, or create better programs, or be more just in the face of oppression, systemic racism and greed. But I cannot, for that would be mere speculation. Maybe accepting mystery simply invites us to realize that we are more helpless than we care to admit, that we don’t have all the answers, and that we need to rely more fully on God’s grace for the living of our days.

So, blessings on all who will proclaim the mystery in the week ahead, both active and retired. I hope you won’t just read the Gospel and then move on. Invite people into the mystery that in the beginning there was the Word, that there is still a light so resilient that it cannot be extinguished by the night, and that we are called to follow the light.

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth;
we have beheld the Word’s glory, glory as of the only Child from God. (John 1:14a)*

With you on the journey,
Campbell Lovett
Conference Minister