

The Gift of Reading
By Rev. Todd Farnsworth
John 1: 1-8



In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome[a] it. 6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

John had found truth in Jesus Christ. He recognized all of the qualities of God in Jesus and John wanted to communicate those aspects to his hungry readers. He used words to tell them about this Word, this *Logos*. For those who attended Bible study last Fall, you might remember that it is the Word, God speaking a Word, that brings Creation to life. It is the Word that gives things their meaning and purpose and sets them apart from other entities. The *Word* makes them real.

In John's culture made up of Greeks and Jews, the word *Logos* would have had a mashed up understanding based on Plato, Stoicism, and Jewish thinking about God. Added to that comes John who offers his particular twist! He pronounces that *Jesus is the Logos*. Jesus is the Word! The One who is, the One who is with God, and the One who is God. Three distinct assertions. John goes on to note that this Word casts a light on the darkness of this world, and that light cannot be overcome.

Those are heartening ideas in an age when "truth" has been sullied by those who cast shadows on its meaning. I find hope that by paying attention to the Word we can somehow illuminate our lives and heal from the pall of lies, misdirection, and obfuscation we are presently living under.

So today's practice for Staying Connected to the Spirit this summer involves: Reading.

Most of us read. Those of us who don't or can't may enjoy listening to books on tape/cd/or streaming. Attending to the words in whatever type of literature catches our fancy can draw us closer to the Word (with a capital W). This is how it works.

- Before you begin to read, take a moment to hope. What a strange idea...but take a moment to hope that God will speak to you in the midst of your reading. Pray that God will open you up in some moment of your reading, to a truth you had not considered before. It truly does not matter what genre you read. You can use this practice with fiction, non fiction, biographies, mysteries, romance, travel, history...whatever you like to read! Begin with hope. It is a way of

trusting that the Logos that was in the beginning is still alive and acting in the world before our eyes (or ears). It is an acknowledgement that we are still connected and if we are attentive, God has more to say to us!

- Next, read. Really read. Sometimes when I am looking at a newspaper or a light book I skim the pages and skip around. Sometimes if I have a big book in front of me, I try to plow through to get to the end. That's not really reading. If you are Reading as a spiritual practice, take your time. Savor small chunks of the book or article at a time. Read deeply. It's not a race. You don't get any points for finishing first. Enjoy what the author has placed before you, let it challenge you, let it tickle you, let it surprise you and confound you, mostly, let it reveal what God may have in store for you.
- Thirdly: notice as much as you can and when something unexpected does appear, write it down on a piece of paper so that you can go back to it later. Keep reading. Keep digging to see what else the Spirit will reveal to you. What new light will be shed into the darkness for your consideration. There are books that have phrases in them that open my eyes to the world in new ways.
- *Examples from Ivan Ilyich by Tolstoy, Sacred Burgers, Betty Edwards, Joy, even Dr. Seuss!*

Dig deeply and go back to your finds, they will lead you to the final part of the practice of reading: asking God to show you the LIGHT.

- Go back to your notes after you have finished reading and reflect on what you found interesting, curious, confounding. Ask God to show you how this discovery might impact your life, or how you are interfering with bringing this truth to bear on you and your relationships. Try to listen for where God is nudging you and how you can begin to live in this new light. Moving out of the shadows we have dwelt in for a long time can be difficult. Staying in those shadows can be more difficult. Step into the light that the LOGOS has blessed you with and begin integrating that new way of thinking, feeling, or relating, into your life. Consider looking at problems upside down, imagine letting go of sacred burgers, imagine antagonists becoming allies.

I have heard many of you talk about the books you've read: from Louise Penney to Charles Dickens to Jacqueline Winspear, Elena Ferrante and Jeffrey Archer. I hope that you will use the gift of reading to draw deeper into your relationship with Jesus. Let there be light! The darkness shall not overcome it.

Amen.