

Sermon for 10.00am on Sunday 4 Feb 2018 – 2nd before Lent
Col 1: 15-20 and John 1: 1-14.

I stumbled across a different name for John's gospel the other day; the Gospel of the Eagle's Eye. Apparently the eagle can look straight into the sun and not be dazzled, and, therefore, was used to symbolise St John in church decoration. A worthy symbol for a man considered to have the most penetrating gaze of all the NT writers into the eternal mysteries, and the eternal truths and even the very mind of God. His clarity of thought and insight into his faith appears in the first words of his gospel. 'In the beginning was the Word...'

Christianity began among the Jews and therefore inevitably it was communicated in the Jewish language and in the idioms of Jewish thought. But, although it had started in Jerusalem, it quickly expanded into the wider world and, within 30 years, or so, of Jesus' death, it had spread all over Asia Minor and Greece and reached Rome. By AD 60 there must have been 100 000 Greeks in the church for every Jewish Christian. But there were difficulties and differences. For example the Greeks had never heard of the Messiah. The very centre of Jewish expectation, the coming of the Messiah, was an alien concept to Greeks and meant nothing to them. This was a problem; how was Christianity to be presented to the Greek world? Through Jewish Messianic ideas and Jewish ways of thinking? Or could a new approach be found out of their background to speak to their minds and heart? Enter the man with the Eagle's Eye.

John lived in Ephesus – a Greek city. He dealt with Greeks to whom Jewish ideas were strange and unintelligible and even uncouth. He was fascinated by the problem. How could he present Christianity to these Greeks in a way that they would welcome and understand? His prayers were answered. In both Greek and Jewish thought there existed a conception of '**the word**'. Here was something that belonged to the heritage of both races, that both could understand and which might be developed to meet the double world of Greek and Jew.

To the Jew a word was far more than a mere sound; it was capable of conveying more than meaning. It had energy to arouse emotion, energy to inspire and carry authority. (Think of Cicero; of Churchill; of Alexander and Napoleon. Think of Jesus) The Jews were wary of words (Hebrew fewer than 10 000; Greek speech about 200 000). Once Isaac had been deceived into blessing Jacob instead of Esau, nothing he could do could take that word of blessing back. All thro the OT we can read ‘and God said’ The **word** of God is the creating power – making the heavens – healing – sending commandments. The OT was written in Hebrew but, by the time of Jesus it was a forgotten language known only by scholars; the ordinary people used Aramaic, a development of Heb. For us, equivalent to the diff between modern English and Anglo-Saxon.

The scriptures were read in Hebrew but, so that the people understood, translations had been made (Targums) but to avoid attributing human thoughts, feelings and actions to God these were written in techn. langu. And became known as ‘the word of God’.

The Greek term for word is ‘logos’ but logos means more than ‘word’ it also means ‘reason-ideas – thought’. It is easy to see how well these understandings of ‘word’ came together in our Christian faith to be synonymous with God and our Lord.

The Fourth Gospel is wonderfully different to the other three – thanks to the Eagle Eye of John.

There are people in our time who are not moved by the traditional presentation of our faith; by the written scripture of the several forms of Christianity but who lean towards a spiritual life.

Did those who looked up at the ‘blue moon’ this last week wonder at its creation? I know a priest who has a picture on his wall of a friend who is an aetheist – it’s there because he says it’s a picture of a very brave man. Most people, I believe, want there to be a creator they just haven’t yet heard ‘the word’. What can we do about it?

