

First Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, MI  
Rediscovering Jesus: The Word  
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Genesis 1:1-5; John 1:1-19

There are two kinds of people in the world, those who like continuity and those who like discontinuity. To determine which kind of person you are, we are going to talk about what you did on your summer vacation. Any of you remember having to write a story the first day of school about what you did on your summer vacation? Well, we are at it again. I will begin with two questions. First, how many of you on your summer vacations, whether this year, or most years, do you go to the same place or places over, and over again? You go to the cottage up north, or a particular place in Florida, or simply visit the same sites. Let me see your hands. Now for the second question. How many of you on your summer vacations regularly go to new places? You try to visit new national parks, new cities, perhaps even new countries. You feel as if you have been there and done that, so it is time for a new adventure. If so, raise your hand. If you raised your hand on the first question, you are someone who likes continuity where things stay the same. If you raised your hand on the second question, it means who like discontinuity. It may be that many of you have some of each within you. And let me be clear, neither of these types is better or worse than the other. They simply are.

I bring up these two types of people because what I have found is that there are similar types when it comes to thinking about God. There are those who are continuity types. What I mean by this is that their memory verse might be Hebrews 13:8, that *“God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”* This verse brings great comfort to continuity folks because it reminds us that we know that there is something solid beneath our feet. That in the ever-shifting sands of history, the crises of the moment, the anxiety about the future, there is one who never changes. That God’s love will always be present in and around us. In other words, there is continuity to life, the universe, and everything. On the other hand, those who like discontinuity might find their memory verse in Isaiah 43:19, *“Behold, I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?”* In this verse we can see that even though God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, God is always bring forth something new. Just as we may be able to enjoy new vistas on our vacations, with God we can enjoy new vistas on life. In other words there is discontinuity to life, which for some is exciting and hopeful.

The question then comes to us, as to which of these does Jesus represent? Does he represent continuity or discontinuity? The answer is that he represents both because he is the Word. For the last two-thousand years Christians have struggled with this image of **the Word**; that Jesus is the Word and the Word made flesh. Many scholars and others have tried to find the meaning of The Word in Greek philosophy. I say this because the Greek word for The Word, is logos. And within Greek philosophy the Logos was more than simply a word for word. The logos had come to represent an eternal reason that always existed before, behind, and within the universe. In some ways it made the universe tick. The trouble with this explanation for the Word, is that Jesus and his followers were not Greek philosophers. They were good Jews. They were Jews who were reared on the TANAK, the Jewish scriptures. And so, when they heard the word, logos, their minds would have instinctively returned to Genesis 1, where God spoke, and creation arose; where God spoke and brought order out of chaos. In addition, the Gospel of John intentionally references Genesis 1 with its language of “in the beginning.” So, when John refers to Jesus as the Word, *“the Word who was with God, the Word who was God,”* what we are to hear is the creative actions of God at work in and through Jesus, which means that in Jesus we find both continuity and discontinuity. Let me explain.

With the Word there is continuity. God is the one who is the same yesterday, today and forever. When God and the Word brought creation into existence, they did so by bringing order out of chaos. What this means is that this is a creation that operates by a set of rules and principles. We know gravity works. We know that there is a cycle to life. We know that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Granted, we might not like the reaction sometimes, but we know how things work. In the same way we know who God is. God is not only the one who creates and brings order, but we know that God loves. We know that God's creative work is not simply an exercise in physics and chemistry, but is a work of love because God not only creates plants and animals; but that God creates human beings, breathes into them the breath of life, and then lives in communion with them. God communicates with them. God cares for them. This never changes. This is continuity of God. This same continuity is expressed in Jesus as the Word. Jesus was not only co-creator, but Jesus is the one who communicates, in the flesh, the message of God's love for human beings. Jesus is the one who shows God's care for all persons by forgiving, healing, and teaching. In a sense, everything that Jesus offers as the word is in full alignment with God's covenant faithfulness with Humanity. In the Word there is continuity.

With the Word, there is discontinuity. There is discontinuity because the Word is the new thing that is springing forth from God. The overarching story of the Bible is that God created everything and called it "good", meaning that it was created to work as God desired. And part of this good creation was that human beings were designed to love God, love neighbor, and care for creation. Unfortunately, human beings decided that they did not need to do any of these three things. The world quickly turned from one of love and trust, to one of violence, anger, and domination. This was not the "good" world that God intended. What then was God to do? What was the God of order and love, to do with a world of disorder and hate. The answer was to fix it. And so, this book (the Bible) is God's love story of how God is fixing creation. What that means then is that God must do the new thing. God must bring about new ways of solving this creation crisis. God then brings forth prophets, priest, kings, Temples, arks, the Law, and the covenants. Each of these was something new, intended to bring about something old. Finally in the fullness of time, God sent the Word, the logos, to be with us. And the logos continued God's recreative work by making us into new people within new communities, to live in new/old ways. In the Word there is discontinuity.

What does this mean for us? It means two things. First, the combination of continuity and discontinuity means that we can count on Jesus to be the solid ground on which we walk. We can count on the continuity of God's love, grace, and forgiveness, to see us through all that we face in the life. In the face of the crisis that the world and our nation are confronting, we can have sure and certain confidence that God in and through the word, are the same yesterday, today, and forever. Jesus Christ can be counted on in the best and worst moments of our lives. Second, this combination of continuity and discontinuity, tells us that we are not stuck where we are. It tells us that our loves are not finished and complete. That the Word, Jesus, can and will continue to work in us and through us to change us and to change our world. That the Word, Jesus, is not finished with this world even in the darkest of times. It means there are always new positive possibilities in front of us.

The challenge then for us this week is this, to ask ourselves, "How am I allowing the continuity of the Word to give me confidence to live in this moment, and at the same time allowing the discontinuity of the Word to continue to change me into the person God has designed me to be?"