

I was struck the other day by a quote that Keith Miller cites in his excellent book "The taste of New Wine". In speaking of the Word of God, the gospel, Miller quotes Karl Barth: "I am glad I did not invent it, and hence it is not my responsibility to defend it. My only task and privilege is to tell you that God himself said so and says so until this day".

I got to thinking about this and began to realize that Barth's words suggest a lot about the meaning of Advent, the power of the Word of God, and about the manner of Christian witnessing.

The word advent, as you know, means coming. The hopes of the people of God for a coming Messiah are reflected in many instances in the Old Testament, particularly in Isaiah. And the new Testament is a testimony to the fulfillment of that hope.

John, in the gospel attributed to him, is saying that the Christ which he calls the Word was in existence from the very beginning and that the Word remained with God until the time was right. Then the word became incarnate in the person of Jesus of Nazareth --- who came to be recognized as the Christ -- the Messiah.

John's words are these, according to the NEB "When all things began, the Word already was. The Word dwelt with God So the Word became flesh; he came to dwell among us

and we saw his glory . . . "

So it is that Barth can say that God himself proclaimed the gospel and, in Christ and his spirit, is still proclaiming it. At Christmas, and during advent, we celebrate god's invasion of this planet, and of human life. The Word came to dwell among us.

Behind all the glitter of the season, I hope you can see something of what this means to the Christian life and its development. It says that God is not far far removed -- too remote for us. It says that thru acquaintance with Jesus, we can actually become acquainted with God. John says in the 18th verse of the first chapter "no man has ever seen God; but God's only son, he who is nearest to the father's hearts, he has made him known".

No matter how time worn, no matter how trite it might seem - If we are serious about God we will be serious about Jesus Christ. He is the best place we can get know God - - He is, according to the testimony of the scriptures and centuries of Christian experience, God's Word made flesh.

Jesus is God's Word. ~~It~~ He speaks today, speaking a message which neither we nor Jesus invented, speaking as John says grace and truth.

This, I believe, is the real reason we can rejoice at Christmas. This I think is cause to celebrate -- God's opening of himself to man; God removing the protective coverings of

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divinity so that we can see and know him. Let us get happy because the Messiah of God, while he delivers us from our sin, also delivers a living, loving God to us.

That's something of Advent and Christmas. The gospel, which God invented - given to us in a man. Let us make every effort and expend every energy in getting acquainted with that man.

2. Now you will note that this Word -- this truth of God - which he proclaims has power in and of itself.

We wonder about this, we doubt it really. Our hesitancy to talk to others - and even among ourselves - seems to demonstrate our reluctance to use the Word and it seems to show our lack of faith in its power.

Yet we do not deny the power of human words. Many of us for example watched, from a distance, as Adolf Hitler used words as a powerful weapon to mobilize and galvanize the German nation into a frightful war machine. He used words to turn men against themselves, and to inspire aspiration that caused them to overlook common decency and morality.

Then we saw, just a brief time later and across the English Channel, Winston Churchill lift the English people from their despair using words as his most powerful weapon. He, largely thru the use of words, marshalled the English will and inspired his people with a desire to resist that helped immensely to change the course of the war.

Human words, we know, have great power -- but the Word of God, we're not too sure.

But the Word of God does have power in itself. In the 19th chapter of Acts, for example, the author is commenting about specific things that happened under the ministry of Paul and his friends in Corinth. He records: "In such ways the Word of God showed its power, spreading more and more widely and effectively".

Then when Jesus was teaching in the synagogue at the beginning of his public ministry, many people were moved and changed. And Luke, in chapter 4 verse 32, says of the happenings, "His Word was with Power".

Well the word does have power. In another place, a soldier came to Jesus and asked him to heal his ill servant. He recognized the power of the Word. He said, "You don't need to go to him . . . Just say the Word and my servant will be healed".

John says in the prologue to his gospel that the word is light. You know something of how even a small light -- such as a lighted match - can dispel the darkness in a room. Light simply has power . . . more power than darkness. As John says, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never mastered it".

That's something like the power of the Word - the Word which we did not invent. It has power just by being itself -

just as light has power over darkness just by its very nature.

Let us rejoice and be happy. Let us find for ourselves that God's Word is power. Then we shall have reason to celebrate - - and have great confidence and power to be followers of the Christ, . the Word.

3. Now then consider briefly what this statement of Barth's says about the style of Christian discipleship. . . . "I am glad that I did not invent it, and hence it is not my responsibility to defend it. My only task and privilege is to tell you that God himself said so and says so until this day".

You see how we have complicated Christian witnessing, do you knot? If you've tried, usually you have ended up quite frustrated. Chances are you were rebuffed time and time again so you gave it up as a lost cause. Results - people signed up on commitment cards - have too often been the goal of personal witnessing and church evangelism. We have demonstrated a lack of faith in the power of God and his word.

Our task as witnesses is to tell the story of what Christ has done for us. We're not too worry about results. We are to get the word around.

Many of us observed, and some felt, the power implicit in sharing the gospel and not worrying about defending it. The story of the power of Christ in someone else's life is a joy

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to behold.

Our guests of a couple of weeks ago had learned that the the gospel was not their invention -- but they knew that the power of God's word had changed their lives. And out of gratitude to God and from Christian commitment they joyously told what Christ had done for them. They sought not to defend the word but to witness to its power. They were not concerned with results but trusted that the power of God's Word would take care of that.

I didn't notice any arm-twisting, I saw no commitment cards to be signed on the dotted line, and I observed no pressure to do this or that.

That's been the story of Christian growth since the time of Jesus -- positive witnessing to the power of Christ as it has been experienced. Oh there, of course, have been unhappy happenings of forced baptism and conversion by coercion. But for the most part, Christian growth has comethru Christ filled lives joyously sharing the Word -- the Word that made them whole.

That is your basic job as a Christian disciple - to witness to what Christ has done for you in whatever manner you are led to do so.

I am glad I did not invent it, and hence it is not my responsibility to defend it. My only task and privilege is to tell you that God himself said so and says ~~it~~ so to this day.

This is advent. Christ is coming again in the power of God's word. Let us receive him, and thankfully witness to his power. But, whatever, God loves you anyhow.