

## **Power to Become Children...**

**John 1:1—9; 10—18**

Somewhere out there is a child who plays, a child who plays with words: ‘I spy with my little eye... I spy with *the true light that enlightens everyone*... I spy with the power to become a child of God...’ Somewhere out there and somewhere here, among us, there is a child who plays, a child who plays with words. Somewhere a child plays with words because ***“In the beginning was THE WORD, and THE WORD was with God, and THE WORD was God... in the beginning.”*** And from these cryptic statements in the Gospel of John, we can infer the following dynamic possibility: God is not indifferent. God is not aloof. God is not impassive. On the contrary, what’s being claimed from the very beginning is RELATIONSHIP; the Creator of All Things wants to communicate; and from the very inception of the cosmos God is effusive and playful with words. In Genesis 1:3 for example, God’s Creative Power is spoken. God creates just by *saying*..., ***“Let there be light...”*** Psalm 19:2 claims, “Day to day pours forth speech...” and then allow this intriguing contradiction to soak in:

***“There is no speech, nor are there words  
their voice is not heard  
yet their voice goes out through all the earth  
and their words to the end of the world.”***

I don’t know about you, but to me this is fascinating poetry. There is an utterance of a word in each and every thing—in every diverse person, place or thing. In fact, there is so much diversity—so many large and small differences—that Genesis, chapter two, depicts God sharing the responsibility of naming: ***“And whatever Adam, the Earthling, called the living creature that was its name”*** [2:19].

And yet, because words can also be deployed to deceive, to manipulate and to maim (which is what happens with the serpent in Genesis 3), it's necessary for ***“THE WORD” to become flesh and to live among us ... full of grace and truth.*** You can catch a brief glimpse of this same motif in the William Golding book, *Lord of the Flies*, in which a bunch of shipwrecked 12-year-old boys begin to choose up sides and make war on one another. In their midst is a child, named *Peterkin*, whom the bullies call *Piggie*. He finds a conch shell in the surf and when anyone holds it all others are supposed to pay attention to his words.

In a similar way, John's Gospel depicts John the Baptist as bearer of the conch, and when he speaks what he's anticipating is the Original Playfulness of the Word. Unfortunately, every formulaic and legalistic attempt at interpreting God's Word has resulted in a terrible lack of playfulness. There's evidence for this, of course, in Mark 10:14, Matthew 19:14 and Luke 18:16, when the disciples become ***“indignant”*** about the children surrounding Jesus; and Jesus tells them, ***“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.”*** Also, in Luke 7:32, Jesus refers to children calling to one another in the marketplace, ***“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed and you did not weep.”*** Another interesting play of words happens in Luke 13:34, when Jesus addresses the whole city of Jerusalem as follows: ***“How often have I desired to gather your children together as a mother hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing.”*** You see, God wants to play. And God desires children who feel empowered to play—and to play with words in such a way that all our relationships are enlightened, enhanced and encouraged to go deeper and deeper.

***“But to all who received him—who believed in his name—he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.”***

In the best-selling book, *All the Light We Cannot See*, Anthony Doerr creates a series of intriguing characters. One of them is known only as the professor and over the illicit airwaves of Nazi-occupied Paris, France, he uses his radio-transmitter to say this: “The brain is locked in total darkness. It floats in a clear liquid inside the skull, never in the light. And yet the world it constructs in the mind is full of light. It brims with color and movement...” To the tune of Debussy’s *Claire De Lune*, this mysterious figure offers these remarks in the wild hope that children somewhere are listening. And surprise! One of them is a blind, Jewish girl who celebrates *Hanukkah* by lighting her Menorah candles, and the other is an innovative genius, who is drafted, against his will, into the Hitler Youth Movement. These two children are of course separated by politics, geography and the violence that’s taking place around them. And yet, at night, the darkness cannot overcome the light. And the professor continues to teach, “What do we call visible light? We call it color. But the electromagnetic spectrum runs to zero in one direction and infinity in the other, so really, children, mathematically, all of light is invisible.”

Now, I’m not about to touch the physics of that last statement; but I am going to notice the word, ‘*children.*’ Like the illegal radio broadcast in the book, John’s Gospel offers us the possibility of becoming children. Not the children we have been (or perhaps are) between infancy and adolescence. (Age has nothing to do with it.) No, the broadcast goes out from each and every thing—and by responding to the playfulness of the light, the Word of God Made Flesh, we may become ***“the Children of God.”***

So many people want to use the word ‘G-O-D’ as sophisticated adults, as religious experts, as evangelical Christians, as progressive Christians, as politicians, as presidents, as pundits. *God, God, God. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.* But consider BECOMING a child whose coming out to play.

Kathleen Norris wrote a poem in which she compares Jesus of Nazareth to Inspector Clouseau; and if you don’t know who Inspector Clouseau is, I have a few old movies to recommend. In the film, *The Pink Panther* from 1963 and another from 1975 called *The Return of the Pink Panther*, the actor Peter Sellers portrays this buffoonish criminal investigator, who actually solves crimes while looking very incompetent and inept. Anyway, whether you know it or not, ‘Clouseau’ is a cultural reference, which means he’s IN THE CONVERSATION that doesn’t seem overtly about God. But is God there anywhere? Aren’t you curious? Let’s play. Here’s part of a poem, in which the fight over the exact words or the right beliefs fades into the background. It’s called *A*

*Commentary on Luke 14:*

He is there like Clouseau  
at the odd moment,  
just right: when he climbs  
out of the fish pond  
into which he has spectacularly  
fallen, and says condescendingly  
to his hosts, the owners  
of the estate: “I fail  
where others succeed.” You know  
this is truth. You know  
he’ll solve the mystery,

unprepossessing  
as he is, the last  
of the great detectives.  
He’ll blend again into the scenery...

Now, even if you don't get that poem, even if you don't feel the vibe that Kathleen Norris is laying down, what's hopefully more than clear to you is *mud*. All this should be as clear as mud. And do you know what a child, who is curious and playful, does with mud? A child makes mud-pies out of mud and serves it up in slices... and says, 'Do you want some?' Are you that child? Are you that mud?

Somewhere out there is a child who plays, a child who plays with words. Somewhere here, among us, there is a child who plays, a child who plays with words. I spy with my little eye... I spy with the true light which enlightens everyone... I spy *the Word Made Flesh, full of grace and truth*. Right here. So let's talk. So let's listen. Let's play.