Word, Words, and the Warring of Narratives:
John 1 as a Consideration for Narrative Discipleship

In the beginning, before the spin, the slogans, and the soundbites, “In the beginning was the Word.” The Word was with God. The Word was God. This holy headline in John 1 reminds us that before any human talking point, there was a divine Truth– teller whose first voice was not vicious, vague, or violent, but clear, creative, and courageous. If the Word shaped creation, then our human words are not neutral; they carry energy, that energy travels, and they either make worlds or distort them.

Ava DuVernay names our moment as a narrative war, a time when language “breaks eye contact with truth” and the first rupture of democracy happens between words and what they are willing to acknowledge or betray. We see it when acts of violence are baptized as “sacrifice,” when those who defend democracy are branded “insurrectionists,” and when those who enforce an unjust order are simply called “law enforcement” or “security.” We hear “patriot” when we should say “perpetrator,” “order” when we are enforcing oppression, “safety” when we mean surveillance or suppression. Our words are being weaponized, and when we repeat them without question, we quietly enlist as warriors for the wrong side.

John’s Gospel pulls us back to the first Word. This Word does not waffle or wobble; “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” The Logos is not a marketing line but a living line of love stretched from creation to incarnation, from “let there be light” to “the Word became flesh.” When we confess that words have energy and energy travels, we also confess that the energy of this first Word is life-giving, liberating, and light-bearing. The question for the church is whether our words will carry that same current, or whether we will merely circulate the slogans of those who profit from lies and curated narratives.

What does this moment mean for the church? This moment summons us into attentive, audacious, and imaginative speech—what we might call narrative discipleship. DuVernay extends a seemingly simple yet demanding invitation: “watch your mouth and trust your own eyes,” refusing to let anyone else tell you that what you saw did not happen. John’s invitation is even deeper: to follow the Light that is the Word, and to measure all other words against that light. Practically, this means interrogating our language—asking in our preaching, posting, and policy work what happened, who did it, to whom, and why, rather than hiding harm behind hollow half-truths. It means teaching media literacy as Christian formation, helping congregations see when language hides violence, blames victims, or blesses brutality as “normal.”

It also means generating our own Gospel-shaped narrative, rather than repeating the ready-made vocabulary of the state or the market. Organizers, DuVernay cites, speak of shifting away from “the language of the state” toward language that reflects real material conditions and builds power for liberation. The church can echo that wisdom by choosing words that stand with the wounded rather than with the wielders of power when we speak of migrants, protesters, the poor, or those policed. In our committees, councils, conferences, and congregations, we can become communities where words are weighed, where phrases are purified, and where our sentences stand in solidarity with the silenced.

The narrative war is real, and it is loud, but the first Word is louder still. The tide begins to turn, DuVernay suggests, the instant we decide to see and say for ourselves, to keep our language in steady eye contact with truth. May the Church be a sanctuary of steady speech—people whose consonants and cadences carry Christ’s character: truthful, tender, and tenacious. May the energy of our words align with the energy of the Word, so that what we say in sanctuaries and streets, on ballots and in Bible studies, bears the beauty, the boldness, and the bright, blazing truth of God, one faithful word at a time.

To read the article by DuVernay click here

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