

In Anne Tyler's book *Ladder of Years* she tells the story of a family whose members often don't know anything about the lives that other members are leading, in plain sight. Toward the end, there is a crisis, when the young adult daughter decides on the morning of her wedding not to get married. She and her long-time boyfriend had been watching a movie on TV the night before, and the phone had rung repeatedly with a wrong number, someone asking for "Courtney." The boyfriend had finally taken the receiver and said, "Tough luck, feller. Courtney doesn't want anything to do with you." And slammed the phone down. Susie, the daughter, saw in that moment that she could not marry her boyfriend, Driscoll.

"All these things I've been trying not to notice all this time. Like when we get ready to go out and he says, 'How do I look?' and I say, 'Fine,' he just goes, 'Thanks,' and never mentions how *I* look. Or when I'm telling him something that happened, he won't let me tell it my way. He always has to interrupt, to sort of . . . redirect. So I'll say, like 'This patient of Dad's came into the shop today—' and right away he's, 'Wait a minute, you know who your dad's patients are? Isn't that a violation of confidentiality?' and 'Now, hold on, she asked for this by a brand name? Or not,' and 'What you should have told her is . . . ' Till I feel like saying, 'Just shut up! Shut up! Shut up and let me get to the end of this story which I'm sorry now I ever began!'"

In a sense, Susie is saying that Driscoll has been erasing her. He isn't trying to see things from her point of view. In fact, he validates her perception by acting as if her cancellation were a little girlish whim, ignoring her declaration that the wedding is off, and continuing to get dressed and talk to guests as they arrive. He doesn't ask her why she's canceled, and she doesn't tell him.

Eventually, however, everyone is forced to acknowledge that Susie really isn't getting married, at least not that day, and the guests leave and the family starts moodily eating the wedding food. The next morning, Driscoll shows up at the house

to talk with Susie. He comes back down from her bedroom to tell the family,

“See, all night long I thought and thought. I thought, *What is it Susie wants?* And it came to me: I had to set things straight with that kid who called on the phone. But the only person who might know his name was the girl he was trying to reach—Courtney. So this morning I started dialing every possible variation on you-all’s number, looking for Courtney.”

Through a combination of cleverness and really absurdly dogged persistence, Driscoll eventually locates Courtney and interrogates her about who might have been calling her. He narrows it down to a boy he doesn’t know, persuades the boy to follow him to Susie’s house, and then apologizes to the boy in front of Susie. “Now will you marry me?” he asks Susie, and she responds, “Well, I guess.” Courtney and the boy end up staying for dinner, and the wedding is back on.

Driscoll and Susie had reached a point in their relationship where words did not mean what they mean, but functioned sort of as markers of attitude instead. What Susie does is to compel Driscoll to *show* her how much he loves her, rather than *tell* her. He has to go back over the phone call in his mind, figure out what he did wrong, and then perform a Herculean task, locating the unknown caller and persuading him to come to Susie’s house to receive an apology. The demonstration of his love is successful, where words would have gotten him nowhere.

In the prologue to John’s gospel, John says that in Jesus, God has *showed* us how God loves us. The Word came to us, but not as a word; the Word came to us embodied, the enfleshment of what God spoke at Creation. John intentionally echoes the first creation story, in which God speaks the creation into being. “In the beginning, when God created the world, . . . God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the

Word was God.” One commentator says that Jesus is God’s love song, singing life into the world’s babble, chaos, and voices of death. And as long as we’re citing literature here, let me remind you of the creation scene in CS Lewis’ children’s book *The Magician’s Nephew*: “When a line of dark firs sprang up on a ridge about a hundred yards away she felt that they were connected with a series of deep, prolonged notes which the Lion had sung a second before. And when he burst into a rapid series of lighter notes she was not surprised to see primroses suddenly appearing in every direction. . . . When you listened to his song you heard the things he was making up; when you looked round you, you saw them.” I think CS Lewis is channeling the first creation story here just as John is; God thinks of a thing and it is embodied. Jesus himself is the embodiment of God’s love.

Remember how St. Francis told his followers to preach the good news and, if necessary, to use words? In Jesus the Word, God says, “This is who I am!” and who that is is someone who heals, forgives, embraces outcasts, and prays for those who hurt him. In Jesus we *see* that God understands betrayal and denial, suffering and pain, humiliation and death.

John’s prologue is a birth narrative, but it’s about *our* birth as children of God. “To all who received him . . . he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of human beings, but of God.” We are many things—there are descriptors for us about our backgrounds, gender identifications, characters, and so forth—but the *definition* of us is “children of God.” Jesus came to *show* us that we are beloved.

Knowing that one is beloved is transformative. We do not address God from

a position of shame, but of trust. We do not consider other people to be competitors, but family members. Knowing that we are beloved gives us the freedom to regard others with generosity and appreciation, recognizing that we are all together in something much bigger than ourselves, and every one belongs, is essential. We, and all our kin on this good green earth, are the song that God sang into the world's discordant babble.

Let us pray: God of all time,

Your Word became flesh and walked among us. Receive our gratitude and awe for all that you have done through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.