I’m in the word business, you might say. I preach using words. I teach using words. I pray and counsel with words.

Words fascinate me. I’m intrigued with how words are formed, how words sound, how words are used. According to the Global Language Monitor, there are 995,112 words in the English language today. The number of English words is growing at the staggering rate of 25,000 new words every year. It’s a far cry from the first dictionary in America, compiled by Samuel Johnson in 1755, which accounted for 50,000 words.

The average educated American knows about 20,000 words and uses 2,000 words in a typical week. Dr. Louann Brizendine writes in her best selling book, The Female Brain, that women speak on average 20,000 words per day, while men speak 7,000 words daily. While her numbers are disputed by researchers in the field of lexicology, I suspect she is onto something when she insists the female brain is “a lean, mean, communicating machine.”

I have favorite words. Those who have listened to me preach through the years can probably identify some of my pet words. My current list of preferred words includes plethora, cacophony, litigious, perestroika and specificity.

One of my favorite words, oxymoron, is a figure of speech that combines two normally contradictory words. Even the word oxymoron is itself one, since it originates from the Greek word for sharp (oxy) and dull (moros). Oxymorons abound in our culture: deafening silence, genuine imitation, exact estimate, found missing, open secret and plastic wood.

Why am I telling you these things? It’s because God communicates to people using words. Christians refer to the Bible as the Word of God. God’s Word is mediated through human words. God expresses His Word in perfect consistency with the Biblical authors’ writing styles, which explains Paul’s penchant for run-on sentences, John’s attention to detail and the quick, staccato fashion of Solomon’s Proverbs.

For the next four Sundays of Advent, we will focus on the prologue to John’s gospel in chapter 1, verses 1-18. John writes this introduction in order to whet our appetites to read his entire gospel. Every Sunday, I attempt to stimulate you to further listening through the introduction of my sermon. I want to capture your attention in the hope...
Words can be used for enormous good or monstrous evil.

that God will use my words to speak to you. I have read that people decide in the first minute of a sermon whether the preacher is worth the effort of listening. My intent in the introduction, make no mistake about it, is to hook you, to capture you for further listening.

Mark’s gospel begins with Jesus’ baptism and subsequent call to ministry. Matthew’s and Luke’s gospels recount for us the familiar Christmas story of Jesus’ birth. They present, for all posterity, the beloved story of Mary and Joseph, who wrapped their newborn son in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger.

You might say Matthew and Luke provide us with the micro account of how Jesus came to Earth, while John supplies the macro version of the story. In John’s gospel, there is no Mary or Joseph, no angels or wise men, no gold, frankincense or myrrh. John takes us all the way back to the beginning.

“In the beginning,” is how John opens his gospel. John borrows this phrase from the opening lines of Genesis, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (1:1). In deliberate parallel to the first words of Genesis, John recognizes Jesus’ coming as a new beginning in salvation history. Jesus’ life, death and resurrection constitute a whole new creation.

“In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1). Logos is the Greek word for word. The fact that John doesn’t explain what he means by logos suggests he assumes his readers have a working knowledge of the word. Since most of us don’t know its etymology, let me share with you what I’ve learned.

The Greeks interpreted logos as the rational principle that governed the universe. Logos was a Greek philosophical term.

The Hebrew understanding of logos originated within the creation story itself. Logos doesn’t refer merely to a philosophical idea but to God’s creative activity. When God said, “Let there be light, there was light” (Genesis 1:3). Whenever God speaks, things happen. God spoke into existence light and darkness, heaven and earth, dry land and seas, sea and land creatures (Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29).

God’s words have power. We know the power of words. Words can be used for enormous good or monstrous evil.

In 1934, Hitler was propagating his message of anti-Semitism throughout Germany. An 11-year-old Jewish boy named Heinz lived in a small Bavarian village with his family. As tension mounted between Jews and Hitler’s followers, Heinz’s father, a schoolteacher, lost his job and his family endured great hardship. Whenever gangs of Hitler’s youth roamed the Bavarian neighborhoods, young Heinz would steer clear of Hitler’s bullies.

One day, Heinz couldn’t avoid a confrontation with a Hitler youth. A beating seemed inevitable, but on this day, Heinz walked away unhurt, not because he put up a good fight, but because of what he said. Somehow he convinced this troublemaker that a fight was foolish and
...what Jesus offers people is not merely a code of conduct but a new way of living.

unnecessary. From that point on, Heinz learned the power of words to avoid conflict, which was a skill he used often. In time, it was a skill he perfected. Heinz and his family escaped Bavaria and made their way to America. As the years passed, his name became synonymous with peace negotiations under Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. Heinz was a 1973 Nobel Peace Prize laureate. You don’t know him as Heinz. You know him by his Anglicized name, Henry Kissinger.

Words have power. God’s Word has enormous power. God literally spoke creation into existence.

“In the beginning was the Word…” (1:1). This Word participated in the very act of creation itself. “…and the Word was with God.” “With” is a preposition describing an intimate, vital connection with something. This Word was literally face-to-face with God. “…and the Word was God.” Make no mistake about it; this word was divine!

“He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being” (1:2-3). The phrase “all things” is placed in emphatic position to express that nothing comes into existence outside the creative purview of this Word.

The identity of the Word is revealed in verse 14. When John tells us that Jesus is “the Word made flesh.” “No one has ever seen God,” John writes in verse 18, “but the only Son who is close to the Father’s heart, he has made him known.”

Okay! So what! I’ve said previously, every time you hear me preach, I want you to mutter under your breaths, “So what? So what difference does this passage make in my life!”

Here’s what! John wants us to know right from the get-go that Jesus is both eternal and divine. You see, plenty of people are willing to afford Jesus the stature of a great moral teacher. But they resist giving him the status of the divine, eternal Word of God. John wants us to know that everything else that follows in his gospel—Jesus’ miracles and healing, his penetrating insight and moral profundity—emanate from his exalted status as divine and eternal. John unambiguously affirms from the outset of his gospel Jesus’ full deity. To be eternal and divine is precisely what it means to be God.

The intent of John’s gospel is spelled out for us in chapter 20, verse 31. This passage is as close to a purpose clause as you will find anywhere in John’s gospel: “But these words are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that through believing you might have life in his name” (20:31).

Next Sunday, as we walk our way through the prologue of John’s gospel, we will consider the kind of life Jesus offers people. Suffice it to say that what Jesus offers people is not merely a code of conduct but a new way of living. Jesus doesn’t simply dispense rules for proper behavior, he gives new life!
If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. He is God’s supreme visual aid.

This sermon is intended for anyone who is somewhat confused by all the fuss over Jesus during this Advent-Christmas season. We focus on Jesus so much in this church because we believe him to be divine and eternal. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. He is God’s supreme visual aid. You might say Jesus is God with skin on.

The early church father, Origen of Alexandria, writing in the early 3rd century AD, described Jesus in his treatise entitled *On First Principles*. He told of a village with a huge statue, so immense that no one could see the face of the person it was supposed to represent. So, someone miniaturized the statue so people could see the person it honored. Origen said that this is what God did in his Son. Jesus is the self-miniaturization of God, the visible icon or image of the invisible God. Jesus cuts God down, as it were, to human size.

Perhaps you’ve heard me reference the huge power lines that cut through Vienna and accompany the W&OD bike trail. These high voltage power lines carry thousands of volts of electricity. Sometimes on the bike trail, you can actually hear the power surging through the lines. Before this electricity can be of use to us in our homes, it must pass through electrical transformers, which cut the power down to 120 and 240 volts. Otherwise our homes would be incinerated.

Jesus is like an electric transformer. He cuts the power down to a size we can comprehend.