

## Dan Nolta

I suppose every writer with an assignment in view is constantly on the lookout for inspiration: “What should be my topic? If I write that, would it make any real difference?” I can honestly say that I was not thinking that at all the day I was sitting with an assembled group of friends, but like a bolt of lightning a verse of Scripture flashed into my mind and I knew that this one would stick for a long time. It was 1 Corinthians 14:8, “For if the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for battle?” At the time I didn’t even remember the context. (I soon discovered that it was regarding speaking in tongues, yet so applicable to that moment.)

What I wanted, desired, yearned for, was the *certain* (clear, definite) word of Scripture to be applied to the topic being discussed, debated, and subjected to discernment—for way too long a time, according to me.



It was in those moments that I weighed again the value of the Scriptures, God’s word in my own life. I truly count the Word of God and the words of God to be the proverbial backstop to what I believe the Spirit is telling me. I count on it to provide knowledge and direction for daily living as my wife Judi and I live on here at Friendsview Retirement Community.

This week I share with you some of what I view as the *certain words* of Jesus, as read in the gospel of John.

*BIBLE READING: John 1:1-4*

When I was a boy, long before television was in every home, I remember faithfully listening to my favorite radio programs—among them, The Lone Ranger. He, with his faithful companion, Tonto, rode the Wild West, bringing justice where little was to be found. At the end of each program, someone would ask, “Who was that masked man?” A voice would be heard replying, “Why, that’s the Lone Ranger!” In the background, as if he were genuinely riding off on his horse Silver, you would hear the Lone Ranger shout, “Hi-yo Silver, away!” And it was all over for another week.

Coming into this century: “Driver’s license and registration please.” “Passport please”—each one a request from an authority figure, seeking to find out with certainty who we are.

“Certain words,” identifiers if you will, are also needed for the one called Jesus. Can we, with integrity, be followers of Jesus if we are not certain who he is? But how are we to know?

Our Scripture for today identifies for us the Jesus of eternity, the Jesus of creation, and most critically, the Jesus who is eternally God. He is the light who has shone in the lives of many, even in my own. He is the Word become flesh, and I know it with a certainty, “for the Bible tells me so.”

The days in which we live have no room for ambiguity. They are days that demand straight, unwavering, certain answers. Do you know them? Will you share them?

*SONG: Jesus Loves Me*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, you have revealed yourself to me through your word. Now I pray that today you will give me grace to reveal you to others by the words of my mouth and the testimony of my life.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: John 4:21-26*

It was undoubtedly a hot and dusty day of travel as Jesus stopped beside Jacob's well for a midday break. The Samaritan women were accustomed to drawing their water at noon, and by "chance," this likely middle-aged woman (it takes awhile to have five husbands) met Jesus. She did not know him beyond the fact that he was a Jew, but he knew her.

The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew, I am a Samaritan woman." Jesus answered, "If you knew...who it is that asks you for a drink..." The woman said: "Sir, I can see that you are a prophet. I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."

She knew he was a Jew. She saw he was a prophet. She knew that the Messiah was coming. She then came to believe that he really was the Messiah, the Christ who was to come.

Why did she believe? Was it his authoritative tone? Was it his revealed knowledge of her past? Was it the certainty of his words? It was likely a combination of the three that brought this woman to a place of faith—a faith that she then shared.

Hear the testimony of the Samaritans with whom she shared: "We no longer believe just because of what *you* said; now *we have heard for ourselves* and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

Certain words—"I who speak to you am he."—bring certain results.

*SONG: My Faith Looks Up to Thee*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, I am so glad Jesus came; so glad that who he said he was then is who he is today.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: John 14:1-6*

Thomas is listening closely and questioning: “Can it be true that Jesus, having brought us this far, is now going away? I gave it all up to be his follower and now he is going away? Where is he going? I don’t want him to go. He’s preparing a place for us; we can be with him? Lord, we don’t know where you are going. Tell us where, tell us how, so we can follow you.”

And then the words that Thomas would not understand until later: “I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.” Thomas and the other disciples came to understand and now we understand. Jesus proclaimed himself to be the way to the presence of the Father God, to salvation, to eternal life, to life abundant here on earth.

“No one comes to the father *except* through me.” Those are certain words: *inclusive* of all those who come through him and his atoning sacrifice; *exclusive* of those who choose to believe that he is not the way, that there are other ways. As some would say in more modern terms, “all roads lead to heaven.” Is that what Jesus meant or did he really mean, “...except through me”?

If there is a life and death destination, “go right to freedom and safety or go left to slavery and death,” I will speak with authority, truth and certainty: “Go right!” This is no time for ambiguity, timidity or uncertainty. “I am the way, the truth and the life.” These are certain words spoken in no uncertain terms.

*SONG: Our Great Savior*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, you are the way. Help me to hold to that belief with love and without arrogance.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: John 3:3-7*

Two thousand plus years ago Nicodemus was confused over the meaning of Jesus words, “born again.” For Nicodemus the confusion was in thinking that people needed to go through the natural birth process—entering again into their mother’s womb.

Today the problem is far different. Many have substituted for the born again experience some feel-good, “pull yourselves up by your bootstraps,” “coming into the light,” nebulous experience, that may be far from the meaning Christ intended for Nicodemus or for moderns in this century.

To be born again is to be given a spiritual start-over; to be re-born by God’s Holy Spirit; a new creation in Christ; the sin slate wiped clean; all things having become new through the power of the Spirit—that is to be born again.

Coupled with the imperative, “You must,” it becomes a commandment for all ages and for all of the ages. Scripture gives us today the same imperative Jesus laid on Nicodemus many years ago. The new birth is a command, not an option.

While being born again is a command, it is the love of God that gently, but boldly encourages us to accept this wonderful second chance at life. And God’s Holy Spirit at work in the world offers up this gift to all.

From Nicodemus’s actions—in his providing for Jesus’ burial—we are left to assume that he was born again. Jesus’ certain words were followed by a certain decision. May it always be so with us.

*SONG: Ye Must Be Born Again*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, you have given me a second chance at life. Please help me not to waste it.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: John 11:25-26*

Being a chaplain for both police and fire for way too many years, death was an almost daily companion—accidents, homicides, SIDS deaths of little babies—not a pleasant companion.

Living now in an adult retirement community, I am “invited” to funerals at least a couple of Saturdays a month. Boy, does my life sound depressing? It would be if Jesus had not spoken these certain words to Martha: “He who believes in me will live even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” In those certain words I find joy. Among a host of others, my moms (my birth mother and the two ladies who “adopted me”) are living with the Lord. My second-grade school teacher, who invited me to Sunday school; my high school biology teacher who kept a big old picture of Jesus on his living room wall—they yet live!

Each of us could do a roll call of those who have survived their earthly deaths and now live with the Lord. They yet live, we can see them again! But Jesus added a qualifier that closely follows his “except through me” and “You must be born again.” Conditions, qualifiers, yes, one is added here: “He who *believes in me* will live....”

Jesus wanted from Martha a certain response to his certain words and asked her in what I imagine was a quiet but firm voice: “Do you believe this?” And so today he asks us the same question: “Do you believe?”

How happy I am to say, “Yes, I believe.” And from that answer and the resulting life, *I know* that I will live.

*SONG: Because He Lives*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God my Father, I believe. Help me today to act in a way that is consistent with my belief.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: John 5:8-15*

It was not a vacation taken poolside that the man was “enjoying” that day. He was an invalid, paralyzed, or at the least, unable to walk. His life was defined by his disability—until Jesus! The command came, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” And he did it. He picked up his mat and walked. But that was not the end of the story.

A dispute arose over the day on which he was healed, the Sabbath, and the man could not say who it was who had healed him, whose command he had obeyed. With the second appearance of Jesus the mystery was over, and the healed man was compelled to act, to tell who it was who had brought about his healing.

The highlight of the story in my mind is the declaration, “The man went away and told the Jews...” He had the answer and he sought them out so that he could share positively, certainly, “that it was Jesus who had made him well.”

Certain words by the Savior brought forth certain words from the one who was healed.

Let’s be challenged this day to speak with certain words to the world in which we find ourselves—to our neighbors, our friends, to anyone who will listen. It was Jesus who made me well, gave me a second chance, brought my salvation, is my Savior, is my Lord.

*SONG: Jesus Paid It All*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, this day, may I have the opportunity and the courage to share that it is you who has made the difference in my life. Please arrange that opportunity.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: John 13:34-35*

I was born in 1939, just before WWII began. I spent the next several years with all of the men in our family off to war. My dad and all of my uncles were gone overseas, leaving the women of our family to raise the kids. The only man around me was “Pop,” my mom’s father, my grandfather.

Pop loved me. I know he did because he showed me. As I look at the attributes of love, the one most easily assigned to Pop is patience. “Do it this way, Danny. Hold it just like this.” “Love is patient...”

Pop taught me about love. He showed me how. It wasn’t until much later in my life that I found out that Pop’s father, my great-grandfather, was a circuit riding Methodist preacher. Pop had learned from him. Great-grandfather Xavier had learned love from Jesus and passed it on.

Jesus’ words for today: “Love...as I have loved you.” These words are an imperative for us that our children will learn. They will imitate us. They will love others as we have loved them, and we, as Jesus loved us.

Pop was a great model for me but not perfect. If our love is to be perfect, we must copy the perfect model. Jesus was not timid or uncertain about holding himself up as a model for us so he confidently spoke to us with certain words, “love...as I have loved you.”

*SONG: Love Found a Way*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, thank you for all of the “Pops” of the world who have loved me. But thank you more for the perfect love of Jesus. Be present with me every moment of today that I may show the world the same kind of love that Jesus has shown to me.*

—Dan Nolta