

Sermon: In the Beginning Was the Word

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles, Ottawa, Jan. 4, 2026)

Happy New Year! It is customary, on this first Sunday of a new year, to look back to the year's past, to reflect, meditate, and perhaps to gleam something of the past, so as to take it forward, to help us in the future.

However, instead of taking you back a year, I would like to invite all of you back 50 years. Now bear with me just a little bit, for it will become clear why it is helpful to look back 50 years, kind of back to the future.

So 1976 it is. What happened during that year? Let's see, Jimmy Carter was elected as President of the United States, who would become an one-term president, losing the next election to Ronald Reagan in 1980.

Pierre Elliot Trudeau was the Prime Minister of Canada in 1976. Under his leadership, Canada became the seventh member of the Group of Seven (or G7), an informal forum of seven major countries, coordinating global economic, security and other transnational issues.

However, 1976 was also the year that the PQ, or Parti Quebecois, under René Lévesque, won the Quebec election, for the first time, promising greater autonomy for the province while enacting the infamous Bill 101 (the French language charter). As we now know, the electoral success of the PQ would eventually lead to not one but two Quebec referendum campaigns (in the 1980 and 1995), seeking to take the province out of Canada in its entirety.

What else happened in 1976. Let's see: disco was all the rage. Occupying the top spot of Billboard 100 was the Silly Love Songs by Paul McCartney. The song, which features disco overtones, was apparently written in response to music critics accusing McCartney of writing predominantly silly and sentimental love songs. So guess what, he wrote precisely that, and people loved it.

Here are some popular movies of that year you may still remember: All the President's Men, Taxi Driver, and of course Rocky just to name a few. What else happened in 1976? Well, NASA unveiled the first Space Shuttle, naming it the 'Enterprise', a definite ode to popular TV series Star Trek. Apple Computer was founded by Steve Jobs. I still remember my first computer was an Apple IIC, where I learned to code the programming language of BASIC. What fun! Toronto's iconic CN Tower became opened to the public that year, becoming the world's tallest freestanding structure.

Montreal hosted the Summer Olympic, which was plagued by boycotts and financial issues (I believe people in that city are still paying for that white elephant of the Olympic Stadium to this day). Did I mention in 1976, laws were passed decriminalizing homosexual acts in private, and allowing for legal abortions under certain conditions. Yah, those happened that year.

On a more personal front, I was turning 7 back then, so attending first or second year elementary school at the time. I don't recall much of that period of my childhood, except I loved riding bicycle, and was riding one too high for my height. But I didn't care; I took that bike everywhere I went.

How about you? What do you recall of your life in 1976, fifty years ago? What significant milestones were you experiencing back then, that still have impacts on your life, on who you eventually turned out to be?

Now, I know fifty years is a long time, and some of you may not even have lived that long, yet. The reason why I have chosen this, is because fifty-year hindsight can separate noises from what was truly important, and it is roughly the time between the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, and when the Gospel of John was written. Out of the four gospels preserved as Scripture, John was the last written, around 80-90 AD, and perhaps the most profoundly theological.

Mark was the first ever gospel written, and the shortest of the four. Mark's focus is on the life of Jesus on earth, and how it confused and befuddled those around him, including and particularly his closest disciples. Matthew was written, around 10 years after Mark, with the focus of Jesus as fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament. The Gospel of Luke was written about the same time as Matthew. One should really count the Acts of the Apostles as sequel to Luke, as they are written by the same author.

The combo of Luke-Acts focuses on the lives that touched Jesus, and the lives that Jesus touched. It is akin to the theory of '200-year-present' as constructed by Elise Boulding, the Norwegian-born American sociologist. It is a theory whereby one places oneself in the middle of history of 100 years back and 100 years forward, considering all the lives that have shaped you, and all the lives that you will touch and help shape.

As ambitious as Luke-Acts combo maybe, the Gospel of John takes it further, much further—John locates Jesus from the beginning of time, as the opening paragraph of the Gospel reveals,

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,

*and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.
All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into being.
What has come into being in him was life,
and the life was the light of all people.” (John 1:1-4)*

The “Word”, or *logos* in Greek, is translated as a word, a message, or the truth. It takes us to the creation account in Genesis, whereby God created the cosmos by spoken words.

God said, “let there be light,” and there was light’.
And God saw that the light was good,
and God separated the light from the darkness.
God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.
And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.
(Genesis 1:1-5)

Day after day, God created everything by spoken words (*Logos*), and God saw all that were created as good. And on the sixth day, God created humans in the image of God, male and female he created them, and saw them as very good. The genius of John’s theological formulation is to recognize the Word that created all flesh, has become flesh in itself, as he declares,

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”
(John 1:14).

The word “dwelling”, or *tabernacle* in Greek, harkens back to the time of Exodus, where the glory of God lived amongst the Israelites in their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. As God literally pitched a tent amongst the Israelites, *Logos*, the Word becoming flesh is pitching a tent with us, and this *Logos*, or the Word, is none other than Jesus Christ, the Son of the Triune God. We have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

In his theological formulation, John the Gospel writer introduces the testimonial of John the Baptist. This was a man sent by God, and came as a witness to testify to the Word as light. He himself was not the light, for the one after him, that is Jesus, is the true light, and is coming into the world.

Though Jesus was in the world, and the world came into being through him, but the world did not know him. It is a sad reality of this darken world, not only the world did not know him, those who knew Jesus, his own people, did not accept him. But the good news is for any, for all who received him with open arms, and believed in his name, they would be given power to become children of God, not by blood nor by flesh, but by the will of God.

In a way, the Word became flesh, so all flesh could be reconciled with God, to become God like. I have said it before, the Gospel of John is the most theological, not in a way that is inaccessible to common people, but in the way this Gospel, these words are written, so that we may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing, we may receive life eternal.

So brothers and sisters in Christ, as we come to this turning point of the calendar year, we are truly blessed that I have the privilege to proclaim these words, and you have the privilege to receive them:

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.
All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into being.
What has come into being in him was life,
and the life was the light of all people.”*

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us.”

These words have profoundly impacted lives of countless generations, and will continue to impact lives of many more to come. That is the story of the Church, our collective story. We are the continuing legacy of this Gospel, that locates Jesus as the Logos, as the Word of God, as God, and locates us within God’s eternal truth.

I wonder how people 50 years from now, will look back and think of us, of the Church, and of the world we dwell?

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**