

I sometimes wonder... what do you want me to say to you?

Perhaps, if you were lying in a bed somewhere in some lonely wing where an aged life requires assistance, I might tell you that the good news has indeed come again. That light from true light is here once more. And that this light is so, so bright, that it's as if the northern most star was dancing just for you outside of your window last night. And like the Magi who once travelled from a far off place to visit the scene at the cradle of life, so have those whom you have loved, now come back to you, in this very moment, in the waiting room of life, to hold your hand. So lift up your eyes and look around, for lo, they are all here gathered together, and on nurses arms they've come to you. So let us indeed rejoice in this good news and sing a new song for it is a new day, and a new year, and yet, God's love is as it has always been – eternal. Eternal. Amen.

Or maybe, if you were, say, curled up, stricken somewhere in some corner of a home for addiction and rehabilitation, I might tell you that though thick darkness has covered the earth, and thick darkness the peoples, the Lord has indeed arisen, and his glory has finally appeared. And it has appeared in none other than in the story of a birth. In the dawn of a new life. And it was at that birth, and in that new life, that a great moment of epiphany descended upon all the world. Where the powers that control and govern this land were made to shake and tremble, for they knew their time was finally at its end. For here was a new king, whose first orders were none other than to restore the poorest of us. Such that the lowest were to be exalted, and the most troubled set easy, for all fears and sources of oppression were now and forever to be vanquished. So let us all hail our new King, in whom God has been revealed, who was born so to make us new and set us free. And may we be just that this year. Renewed. And freed. Thanks be to God and Praise be to Christ. Amen.

Or, say, if I was not here in this pulpit, but instead somewhere else like West Kensington for instance, I might say hear the good news! For God has disrupted the centralized systems of power. For in dark-skinned Arab priests -- distinct foreigners and outsiders -- God sent these, his messengers to worship not the white Roman Caesar, but the humble Christ-child who today would be born but as a brown Palestinian boy. And it was in that child, that all courses of society would be upended and reversed. Where the last suddenly would be made first, and the abundance of the farthest seas, and wealth of the greatest nations, would be brought to the disenfranchised as just recompense. Alleluia and Amen.

But, mostly, you are not those people... what do I say to a people like you? Like me? Who are not these of the lowest? Who are not of the poorest? Who are generally not of the oppressed and typically not of the afflicted and disenfranchised? What is the gospel message this day to a people such as us? What is our good news at the birth of this child? Sometimes, I think it would be easier to preach a better sermon if we all suffered just a bit more. But... acknowledging that's kind of wrong (especially since some are/have suffered), and that suffering is not something I'd ever wish on anyone here, least of all myself, let me take that back and try a different approach... So, who made a New Year's resolution last night? No, seriously. What are you seeking to resolve? Or to do new or differently this year? For me, I decided I want to coin a new word for the Oxford English Dictionary. I mean, if they're going to allow YOLO and Bracketology to get in, than why not something I can come up with?

Originally, I wanted to go with "Gospelite" -- as in one who lives a life according to the good news of Jesus Christ -- but much to my dismay, "Gospelite" is already in circulation. Perhaps not surprisingly, it's the moniker used by a Christian-gospel duo, named Chet and Dave. And they probably have the most appropriate album cover ever, that is, for a group so called Chet and Dave: *The Gospelites*. You really have to check it out when you go home. It's all kinds of awesome. And just imagine! All of sudden, somewhere in some remote room, Chet and Dave will get a ping that they've been recently searched for by an astonishing 100+ people from Philadelphia and in a single day! It'll be great!

Ahem... You might think, it's probably just as well that they're already using it, seeing that "Gospelite" doesn't really connote anything that different than say, "Christian" anyway. Yet, the term "Christian" has become so muddled, that I sincerely doubt anyone could ever really define it, universally, in a single sentence anymore. For the idea of a "Christian" simply meaning being a follower of Jesus Christ appears now lost forever. And it arguably all started back with Paul -- who probably gave rise to more of our dogma than Jesus himself -- when he expanded upon and ultimately began defining the qualifications of a true disciple of our Lord and Savior. Yes, gone then were the good old days when you could be just but a fisherman or tax-collector on the side of the road and simply notice something unique in Jesus, enough for him to ask you to walk with him from town-to-town, eating with and learning from him, and thereby being called one of his beloved.

Yes, long gone are those days indeed, for today, "Christians" are now examined and categorized by all sorts of qualifications. For instance, are you conservative or liberal? You can't be both and really only one is Christ-like, so which one is it? And hey, are you for infant baptism or not? But before you answer that, are you against abortion? Because that's most important! Well, provided that you are also okay with the death penalty, of course. And what do you say about this: are you for shared bathrooms or aren't you? Jesus clearly only went into the men's room in the Galilee strip mall. Can you exegete in Greek -- you know the language that the linguist Jesus was expertly fluent in? Can you espouse proper polity and wax Barthian theology -- after all, those were the truest marks of Church leadership, especially of those in those early days down in the catacombs, in case you've forgotten! But most crucial of all -- do you see foreigners and strangers as a threat -- for instance, are you for the church militant, willing to fight a holy war against this barbarity of Islamic fascism or not? ¹ For truly, nothing personifies "Christian" better than being suspicious of your other.

¹ http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/30/us/church-militant-theology-is-put-to-new-and-politicized-use.html?_r=0

Yes, the title "Christian" has unfortunately become too broad of a term with too many shades of identities and bizarre mutations. And this is more or less why I originally wanted to go with "Gospelite," because at least it's anchored in something specific and firmly rooted in the life, teachings, and actions of Jesus the human being – the actual man who was publicly and divinely anointed at his baptism, who lived and died and lived again, and in whom the revelation of God was made known to us then, now, and even forever more.

But alas, as we've discovered, the term is already in use. So moving on then from "Gospelite," I have decided that my submission for 2017 will be ...organ roll, Ken... "Bibleish." Yes! Bibleish: The great word of 2017! Say it with me. Bibleish. It's just fun to say, isn't it? Bibleish. "Oh, you're so Bibleish." "Dude, that's very Bibleish of you!" It just works. And if it doesn't, well, I'm going to spend the next several minutes making it work!

But whatever does it mean? Well, it's simple! It's an adjective which means that one has displayed a great appreciation for The Bible, so much so that their daily behavior and thought processes reflect a great many, though not necessarily all, of its teachings. Easy enough. Now of course, it first requires a vague understanding of the Bible, which in and of itself, requires an actual reading of the Bible, but the -ish also provides us with a wide range of possibilities. For the -ish here, as with most words that are something-ish, gives us, the employers of this beautiful word, an escape clause out of being too literalist in nature, which otherwise, in this case, would have required of us a strict adherence to every word in scripture, no matter how demeaning, cruel, or bizarre the teaching. Thus, being Bible-ish in 2017, as you can see, is actually quite freeing!

But seriously, being Bibleish is not just a poor elaborate joke here in the middle of this "sermon" so to wake you up -- though I wouldn't blame you for thinking otherwise. For I'm actually serious. Being more Bibleish is really my New Year's resolution. And I hope it will be yours as well. I sincerely want all of us to become even more familiar with what's actually in our Holy Scripture. To actually read it. As shocking as that is! And not just on Sundays and the two little lessons we get here, but maybe like a book or something a month. From the visions of the prophets, to the teachings of Christ, even to the Revelation and veiled political polemic of John, I want us all to become more familiar with God's word, and more, a living embodiment of its many great teachings on humility, sacrifice, and love, just to name a few. Honestly, one of the great steps along my journey of faith was taken when I had to study and prepare for the Bible Content Exam just this past year. I re-read Scripture from front to back, in just two months, mind you, without skipping a story or an entry or even an obscure law. And I saw connections that I never knew existed before. It was truly amazing. It all made sense in a way that I never before considered. There was cohesive narrative, almost from book to book. And in such a short time, my faith became more authentic, more genuine, more Bibleish.

Moreover, and perhaps most importantly of all, I also became in that process a certified fact checker. For instance, I was recently asked by someone here why men are the generally the ones who wear halos in the Bible, and now, I was able to tell him that halos are not in fact in the Bible, so pay no worry to that! Likewise, when a confirmand just asked how the battle of Armageddon was described – if it was anything like Lord of The Rings? – I told him that the battle itself was actually not described at all, which I think rather disappointed him. But, and of greater consequence, when a friend recently inquired as to why God would ever say that "we are not given more than we can handle," (he was told this by a Priest) I was able to quickly disabuse him of that thought, saying it wasn't in fact scriptural, nor was it in any way pastoral – and he was both surprised and comforted by that, having thought his sufferings, which were too much for any single person to handle, were directly attributable to a malicious sort of God.

Being Bibleish then is the sharpest tool we have in this era of fake news and false prophets. By actually reading it, and doing so together, piece by piece, story by story, we here at PCCH can ensure that the gospel is being rightly disseminated, preached, and heard. And before you laugh all this off and think I'm just taking the piss – I'm not! For just a month ago, at Walking the Walk, this inter-faith program that the confirmation class is a part of this year, we re-visited the SEPTA scandal from two years ago -- do you remember it? -- where a doctored picture of a prominent Arab leader and Adolf Hitler were seen laughing together, coupled with false claims that the Quran promotes Jew hatred and violence against them. Astonishing. Frightening.

We cannot then, although in many ways we already have, allow *our* faith to be so misrepresented by those in positions of power and with the means of communication to do so. Rather, we must combat any and all false representations of Christ wherever we see and hear it and we must preach the gospel message louder than ever before. And what is that gospel message? Only this: that the light has come into the world and darkness has not overcome it. That the poor and the scattered will one day be restored, for they are indeed God's chosen people. And ultimately, that all systems of nefarious rule, evil, and corruption will be destabilized and overthrown by the dangerous revolutions of humility, peace, and love, which were first brought into motion on that wondrous night where a little child was delivered into a manger, and visited by priests from the east, of foreign origin.

May each of us then become more faithful to the true gospel in 2017. May each of us become more Bibleish in our lives, such that the definitions and qualifications of what makes a Christian a Christian, will be reverted back to those who simply spend their lives following in the footsteps, not of Barth or Calvin, or Obama or Trump, or Rush or Rachel, or Cindy or Brian, or Austin or Ken, or of anyone else for that matter, save for none other than Jesus Christ himself.

Amen.