

My kids have all been through a phase of getting really frustrated with me not understanding what they're talking about. This was usually around new-to-me language I didn't understand ... one day, one of them saw me for the first time in festive white vestments for a feast day at church and told me it was "good drip;" another time, when I asked whether dinner was ok, they said "it was bussin'" apparently these are both good things; if I didn't believe they'd done their homework, I'd get the response, they had "no cap." Language is constantly changing.

At some point, a while back, I realized my kids were fluent in a way of being in the world that's alien to me. And it's not just language. Culture shifts, too. Ways of being with people I'm familiar with, how I might start a conversation, how I might spend time with someone, these are also a little different for my kids, who are all a part of what's called Gen. Z. They text, they don't really talk on the phone. They facetime or spend time together digitally, more than they hang out in real life. They're connected to their feed and consume information about the world around them at an unbelievable pace.

Watching them is watching a new world coming into being. Some things will be a gimmicky flash in the pan, every generation has plenty of those, and others will endure, and this generation (like all those that came before) will have changed the world that we were only too familiar with, they'll have changed it in indelible ways. ... In different ways, and at different rates of change, this has always really been the case. As the saying goes, 'Life is change.'

This truth is one of the reasons I find it utterly extraordinary that the Christian faith, rooted as it is in the texts of the Old and New Testament, has been carried, transmitted through the generations,

across the globe and across millennia. With all the change that is an inevitable part of every generation and every culture in every time, this is something quite remarkable. Even imagining my kids having a conversation with my great-grand-parents, all of whom died some time ago, I can only imagine all the things they would stumble on in order for each to be fully understood by the other; despite sharing English as their only language, and sharing (largely) the same cultural identity, and being separated by only 100 or so years, effective communication and shared understanding would, I imagine, be really hard.

The other reason it's utterly extraordinary is that even when we have a shared experience, even when we're all in the same place at the same time witnessing the same thing ... if that thing is new, if we have no frame of reference, it's highly likely we'll all interpret it a little bit differently.

In Jesus' time, folks from different walks of life and different parts of society would invariably have interpreted Jesus' life and ministry differently from each other. Making meaning of a new thing is hard, and the chances we would all make meaning in the same way, very remote.

Who we are, where and when we live, and the life we lead shapes the way we see the world, and so it's no surprise that the meaning of, and the ability to recognize, "the messiah" has been, from the beginning, more than a little bit tricky. There is, arguably, no "plain" way to explain the full meaning of "messiah," no straightforward and universally meaningful way to explain Jesus' identity, or purpose.

Jesuit Priest Anthony DeMello once told a parable I think underpins this point. It's called, The Explorer.

In this parable, a person leaves their village to explore the exotic, mysterious, and distant Amazon. When he gets back from his trek, the villagers are rapt with attention as he attempts to explain his experience, especially the beauty of this remarkable place, the scale of it, the experience of being there, and the impact it had on him. He quickly realizes he's struggling to convey his experience in a way that it can be understood, and so he draws a map, and tells his friends to follow the map and go there themselves. The villagers adore this map, they study each and every detail, they copy it so they can each have one, they regularly gather and discuss the map, and soon they consider themselves experts on the Amazon because they have come to know the map so very well. ... yet, none of them actually followed the map and made the journey, and so what they've come to know is very different from what the explorer had hoped to share.

I know many of us struggle with how to describe this life of faith we know and experience, we might also struggle to share our love for this community of faith with those who don't know it, those who've not experienced it for themselves. And so it's worth remembering that in our conversations, all we can ever do is paint a picture for folks to look at, using our words as best we can. But our words can only ever create an image for them to hold in their mind. It will never enable them to know the lived experience, in all its depth and dimension. The lived experience, with all its power and nuance, that comes with sharing this life with a group of faithful people, sometimes for decades.

No one can ever fully understand, if what we're hoping for is a clear explanation, a straight-forward description; a well-articulated definition or a clearly stated purpose or reason "why." Language alone just can't ever get us there, it's too slippery and changeable,

and open to interpretation. There is no “plain” way to share the experience of the reassurance, the satisfaction, the safety, the joy, the connection, the surprises, the love! that is being part of a committed parish community; all the remarkable ways our relationships change and challenge us, feed us and fuel us, support and encourage, console and comfort us.

No picture we paint with our words can ever be the fullness of love that can be found in a community of faith; folks wanting to know...? They’ll need to live it. And we’re called to be the ones who can give them “the map” of how to get there.

And “there” is always changing too.

This place ‘is of’ all the lives of all those who have, and do still, love and worship here, grieve and rejoice here, it is the ongoing co-creation of all whose time and efforts have been poured into this place, and it awaits the next generation, whose new ways of being in the world, new ways of speaking and doing will be folded in and incorporated.

And it grieves, as it changes. Amidst the joys of following Jesus together, and sharing life in community, together, there are griefs, especially when changes mean goodbyes, and today we will say a goodbye...

And yet the life here, that which is constantly being created and recreated as the always-changing parish of St. Luke’s gathers each Sunday, as it has done for many decades, that knowable life is a key part of the experience of following and knowing Jesus as Messiah; and the experience of it will let anyone arriving in this space, with you all, know that they have arrived. They have arrived and a new leg of their journey with Christ has begun.

We will never fully and completely understand the great mystery of faith in this life, but we can be thankful for the life it's given us, and for all those whose vocations and great gifts are St. Luke's today; and we can anticipate, with great hope, all those who may carry St. Luke's into the future, the new ways of understanding life and faith they may bring with them, and the new ways to know Jesus they may teach us, as we journey on together, faithfully following Christ Jesus on the Way. Amen.