

@

It is interesting how one little character can send signals to various people at different times. The @ symbol, used now in a person's email address, has an interesting history. What that journey can tell us about faith has to do with how far we are willing to go with it

In English it's called the "at sign." We use it in internet communication to tell people where we are, where our host is.

As Christians, we might say that in our hearts we are at the cross of Jesus. At the place where we are people are hoping to find love, forgiveness, and grace. When people look at us, they should see Jesus. But often they might find quite the opposite, and do not want to be where we are.

In the 1960's in America, the standard greeting of the hippies was, "where you at, man!" Or to describe a place where things are really wonderful, "that's where it's at, man!"

The church, for Christians, is "where it's at." It is a place of worship, fellowship, learning, and God. A real problem in today's world is that many have decided to be at places other than church, and that is where their heart is at. In decidedly human and physical priority rather than spiritual ones.

In Spanish the symbol is called "snail." If that were the meaning people saw, and it described our spiritual walk, would we want it placed by our name. That person is barely moving with God. They might be hiding in a shell, and afraid to get out. Unfortunately, at one time or another we have always been there.

The Slavs call the @ sign the monkey. So we could say if that was our identifying sign that we move quickly, are mischievous, and climb trees at the drop of a hat. They also travel in troupes, and are very protective and supportive of one another in the journey. So if that were to describe us spiritually, it would not be all bad.

The Afrikaans language, spoken by the Dutch settlers of South Africa, the @ sign has an interesting meaning. They call it "the monkey's tail" (you can see it in

the symbol), is a sign of endearment for someone who has made a silly mistake. As Jesus says, we must be quick to forgive, and not to judge other people.

In Swedish, it has several meanings. In addition to the monkey's tail, it is called an elephantora, or elephant's ear. The elephant flaps their huge ears to express excitement and joy, or spreads them wide to show intimidation. They also flap them to cool themselves, like a large fan.

As Christians, we must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger, James the apostle says. We must be people who care and have consideration for the feelings and self-image of others. When someone places the @ by our name to describe us, is it a fit description as the elephant's ear? We hope so, don't we?

The symbol has also been called in Swedish the kattfot, or cat-foot. When I think of the foot of the cat, it always is put down softly. The purpose for the cat is stealth, for they are natural hunters. For us the Christian meaning might be humility rather than crashing through the bushes with no regard for the landscape or dwellers therein. If we "walk softly and carry a big stick" we must make sure that the stick is the cross of Christ rather than a weapon to hurt someone. We also must be wise or "sly", another attribute of the cat, as the Bible cautions us, in dealing with people who are at cross purposes with the gospel.

The Swedish have still another meaning for this symbol, the kringla, or pretzel. Having fun with this meaning, if it is placed by our name on a spiritual list, do we bring people together? When people think of us, do they think delicious, warm thoughts? When was the last time we took a dessert or a dish over to a friend or neighbor, or just gave them a hug because we could see they needed it.

The negative meaning would remind us to lift others up and help them to feel safe and content, rather than cause them to get twisted up like a pretzel. God does not want us to be knotted with worry, but to be uncoiled for unselfish, saving action on a daily basis.

But let us not forget one of the original meanings of this symbol, used as shorthand to mean "and." As in famous brands, like AT&T, H&R block, A&E Network, and College of William & Mary, to name a few.

It is symbol of inclusion, of welcome. We must say we rather than I, us rather than me as disciples of Jesus. We can use it to remind us that we and Bill and Jane and Dorothy and others are members of God's kingdom together.

And our best use of the term would be always to live as if everything concerned  
Jesus @ me.