### “The World Came into Being” Steve Finlan for The First Church, Jan. 2, 2022

**Ephesians 1:8–12**

8bWith all wisdom and insight 9he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, 10as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, 12so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.

**John 1:1–14**

1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was in the beginning with God. 3All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

Welcome to the New Year. You’ll have material challenges this year, as you do every year. I hope that you are able to draw upon spiritual power to help you to put up with frustrations and difficulties, and motivate you to claim joy and meaning in life.

Our Scriptures are not very down-to-earth this week, but deal with heavenly realities. Both Ephesians and John speak of some of the celestial responsibilities of Jesus. Ephesians refers to God’s intention “to gather up all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth” (1:10). This means that Jesus is in charge of the final perfecting and organizing of the world. John, on the other hand, speaks about the origin of the world. “The world came into being through him” (John 1:10). Jesus is clearly an authoritative figure in heaven, having creator duties and consummation and completion duties.

Is all this important to our lives here and now? Yes. It helps to have a concept of the heavenly role of Jesus, our Creator and our consummator or finisher. But probably of more practical value to you here and now is the statement that, to us, “he gave power to become children of God” (1:12). That is a concept that we can use in our self-understanding and in our understanding of God. It suggests that we should be praying to God in the way that we might talk to a parent, with trust and affection. John says that it is by God’s will that we are God’s children (1:13). In Luke, Jesus tells his disciples to love and to lend, so that they may “be children of the Most High” (Luke 6:35). He also refers to believers as “children of light” (Luke 16:8; John 12:36). His mission was “to gather into one the dispersed children of God” (John 11:52). We have all these images of ourselves as children of God, reflecting light and being gathered together by Jesus. Having the same loving parent, we should live together in a harmonious family, reflecting the love we have all received. We have the power to make this happen. He gave us power to become children of God.

Jesus, in his life and teachings, illuminated what was possible in a human relationship with God. When we study Jesus, we study what is possible for our faith walk, the generosity, forgiveness, and integrity that *we* can practice, the peace and harmony *we* can experience.

Jesus brought light into the world. I think that means spiritual truth, truth about the Spirit welling up in our hearts, truth about God being a nurturing father like the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son. God would welcome us back whenever we wander or lose hope. He does not rebuke us, but rejoices that we have returned. He wants to put a ring on our finger, a robe on our backs, and declare a feast and a celebration. That is the kind of father that God is. James calls him the “Father of lights” (1:17).

The remarkable claim that John makes is that “the Word became flesh and lived among us” (1:14). The Word, the expression of God, which participated in the creation of the world, became incarnated in a human life, a life that the author witnessed, a life “full of grace and truth” (1:14). He contrasts this with the revelation that came through Moses. He says “The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (1:17). Moses brought the right message for his age, a message about law, ethics, civility, justice, and monotheism. But, over time, the religion of law came to be characterized by strictness and humorlessness. Jesus brought a new spiritual style and substance. Grace and truth describe the new life that he offered. Grace includes the graciousness of the loving father. Truth includes the revelation about God’s love. As First Timothy says, God “desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). Some people only come to a knowledge of truth after a crisis in their lives, perhaps a bottoming out experience or a realization that they are not happy with their lives. Whatever it takes, God will endeavor to reach a person. The knowledge of truth is not wholly intellectual; it also takes deep root in our emotional nature, but if we call it “truth” it is because it registers in our minds as a supreme principle or an undeniable fact. It is like being struck by lightning. You are never the same after that experience.

There’s a woman named Jill Murray who grew up in Pennsylvania, and loved it there. But she moved to Chicago and got a job and boyfriend whom she wanted to marry, but after twelve years the boyfriend still didn’t want to marry and she realized she was not happy. She broke up, packed up, and moved back to Pennsylvania. She moved into a writer’s colony, got a writing job, and a man who does want to marry. ([Stories That Prove It's Never Too Late to Change Your Life (rd.com)](https://www.rd.com/list/never-too-late-change-your-life/))

There’s a guy named Michael Pollock who had an addiction to television, watching six or more hours every day, sitting immobile and not doing anything to make his life better. He was lucky enough to get a good girlfriend, named Ellen, who wrote an article about how everyone needs a vision. Without a vision nothing happens in your life. With vision, life enters a course of expansion, she wrote. Michael took it to heart and wrote down how he wanted to live. He cut down on TV, watching only an hour or two a day. He started to spend time reading and journaling, and getting outdoors. His life has changed and he spends lots of time with Ellen. ([How I Overcame TV Addiction and Reclaimed My Life (michaeldpollock.com)](https://www.michaeldpollock.com/how-i-overcame-tv-addiction/))

We have to listen to the truth that is trying to be spoken in our lives. The truth will lead us into an ever-increasing understanding of God, and of God’s plan for us. God doesn’t change, but our understanding of God may need to change. Moses created a foundation for the Israelites to start out fresh with a covenant from God, then a change came when Jesus started out fresh with a *new* covenant, based on grace and truth, with a new recognition of who our brothers and sisters are—the whole human race. This is the big change. We are to be part of this wave of change that is slowly sweeping over the world. We need to be ready to change when it is necessary for our growth. Jesus will help us through every change.