“***Children of God***” by S. Finlan, at The First Church, Jan. 5, 2019

**Jeremiah 31:7–9, 13**

7 For thus says the Lord:
Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, “Save, O Lord, your people, the remnant of Israel.” 8 See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame. . . 9 With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back. I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble. . .

13 I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

**John 1:10–18**

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. 15(John testified to him and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’”) 16From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.

The Gospel of John begins: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . All things came into being through him” (John 1:1, 3). The first thing this gospel asserts is Jesus’ role as creator of this world. But there are two other main points emphasized in what comes next, which is today’s passage, one about the Word itself, and one on what the Word does for us.

In v. 14, John says the “the Word became flesh, and lived among us” (1:14). So the Word, which is part of God, became a human being. This is an intervention of God into the human race—and also a gift. We call it the Incarnation: the Word of God, or Son of God, becoming a human being. Humanity gets a visit from God. Have you ever had a guest who changed your family? Usually you will have a good time, but the guest doesn’t actually *change* your family. A guest who could *change* you would really be extraordinary. Well, the Word is the guest who changes humanity itself.

And that is the other main point I see here, which is that this person led all those who accepted him to become children of God, not *genetically* (not because of “the flesh”), but *spiritually*, because of God’s outreach. The divine man visits humanity, and offers a way for humanity to become divine. The Incarnation of the Word has a transformative effect upon all believers.

This was a central teaching of the early church. The Divine became human, so that the human might become divine. As the 2nd-century church father, Irenaeus, put it, “How shall man pass into God, unless God has first passed into man?” (*Adversus Haeresis* 4.33.4). Christians understood that they were to experience transformation in this lifetime and the next.

Spiritually speaking, we follow the trail that Christ blazed, and we are changed as we travel that trail. As Paul puts it, we are being transformed from one degree of glory into another into that same image (2 Cor 3:18), meaning the image of Jesus.

Often, when we begin talking about Jesus, we end up talking about our own spiritual progress. John’s story, too, begins with Jesus’ pre-existence, his Incarnation in human flesh, and moves on to the remarkable gift of sonship that he offers to humanity. John goes on to talk about what John the Baptist said about the one who is coming after him, who would bestow grace and truth, and who knows God like no one else does, for Jesus is God’s Son.

Grace and truth. What a great way to describe what Jesus brings! Grace is goodness and generosity of heart. Truth is spiritual information, a revelation of God to us. More personally, truth is a guiding light for your life. And these will change you, won’t they? If your heart has been warmed by God’s love, and if your path has been illuminated by God’s truth, you have a way to live that brings hope and peace.

You become a child of God guided by a loving spiritual parent. Being a child of God is something you can actually *experience*. Walk through that open door and unfold its meaning in *your* life. And what do children do? They grow. We also are growing, spiritually, taking on more grace and truth, understanding more about the character of God, learning how to not follow the crowd or seek human approval, but to follow God’s way. Each spiritual step we take, even a small one, brings us closer to God. Jesus emphasized that God is a loving parent, whom he called Father. We could also think of a mother-like aspect to God, and Isaiah speaks of that: “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you” (66:13). The point is the loving watchcare of God throughout your life and in the next one.

God has intervened in your life, and changed it. And God has intervened in humanity, to change us. The divine has become human, so that you might become divine. You will discover grace and truth as you live your life, and will find yet more when you are received into Glory.

Godliness is our goal. What might godliness be, in our lives? It could be many different things. For me, it tends to involve abstract ideas; other people are more concrete. So it could mean following through on the intention to quit smoking and to get healthy. For another, it might begin with finding a way to talk to a difficult person in his or her life, and reach some mutual understanding. For another, it might be finding a way to overcome depression and to live with hope and rekindled interest. It could mean getting excited about studying the Bible. For another, it could be learning to have more confidence that God is actually *loving*. That’ll change your life! A subtle shift in inward confidence makes a difference.

Where will *you* encounter grace and truth in the coming year?