“***He Has Made Him Known***” by S. Finlan. The First Church, Jan. 3, 2021

[**John 1:10-18**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=51)

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.

I want to approach this by putting myself in the author’s shoes. It may be John the Apostle, or it may be a disciple of John’s. Near the end of the gospel it refers to the beloved disciple and says “we know that his testimony is true” (John 21:24). The “we” is probably someone from the community who did the actual writing, guided by John. After all, John would have been close to 100 years old when this gospel was written. I’ll go ahead and refer to the author as “John,” even if John was really an adviser rather than the actual writer.

John was one of the most enthusiastic of the apostles, so much so that Jesus nicknamed him and his brother James the “sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17). They are the ones who wanted to call down fire from heaven upon some unresponsive Samaritan villagers (Luke 9:54). But John was very loyal, and seems to have been a good learner, and as Jesus was dying, he entrusted him with the care of his mother Mary (John 19:27).

Here at the beginning of the gospel, John is bursting with the desire to get us to know about this extraordinary man whom he followed, and whom he realized to be the Son of God. First, he lets us know that “the world came into being through him” (John 1:10). Jesus is the actual creator. He is the Incarnation of the Divine. John knows this is a huge claim he is making. We don’t know if Jesus taught the disciples this, but we do have John recording Jesus as saying “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58).

What kind of story is John going to tell? It will have tragedy and triumph in it. The tragedy is that his own people as a whole did not accept the Divine Son. That is the heartbreak in the story. Yet there is also tremendous triumph, as John knows by having seen people’s lives touched, and through his own transformed life. He knows from personal experience that, to all who *did* receive Jesus, he “gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of the will of the flesh . . . but of God” (1:12–13). Many times John had seen Jesus change people’s lives, such as the woman at the well and the man who was blind from birth (John 4:29; 9:7). He was kind to these people, and gave them what they needed. They were spiritually reborn, and felt affirmed, restored, and respected. The Samaritan woman testified about him to the Samaritans, and the formerly blind man stood up to the Pharisees for him. John saw Jesus’ kindness and attentiveness to needy people; and his openness to Gentiles.

I am willing to bet that there is some way that Jesus has affirmed, restored, or respected *you*, making you feel worthwhile. And we should be showing that to each other. That is one of the things that is so distressing about the political conflict in our country right now, that there are people who call themselves Christian, who are degrading and disrespecting others, including other Christians.

John wishes he could grab the reader and shake him or her, and let them know the truth about Jesus. He says “we have seen his glory” (1:14). In other words, we saw this guy close up, spent years with him, and saw what he could do. John is saying: Will you attend to what I tell you? Do you realize how important this is?

Listen while I tell you how he changed the whole approach to God: “From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (1:16–17). John sounds like Paul here, when he contrasts law with grace. Grace and truth are so much more appealing and emotionally satisfying than law. No longer are we to fear God and anticipate that we will stand condemned before the law. We are to accept the experience of sonship with God, and receive the grace that God bestows. Let me tell you: Jesus is grace embodied.

Just one of the many times that Jesus showed his grace was when a woman caught in adultery was brought before him by the Pharisees, who were ready to stone her to death, but wanted to see what Jesus would say, so they could use it against him. His response was to start writing in the sand, and then to say “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (8:7). And this worked. They left one by one, ashamed. We don’t know what he wrote, but the writing, along with his speaking, triggered their conscience and made them ashamed. Of course, such a strategy doesn’t work if one is speaking to people who are utterly shameless, but apparently that wasn’t the case here. He had a gracious way of handling the confrontation, and also of saving the woman. “Neither do I condemn you,” he said to her, “Go your way, and from now on sin no more” (8:11 ESV).

Is there a way that Jesus has released you from judgment? Has he shown you grace and delivered you from condemnation, then said “sin no more” at the end? Or has he released you from a feeling of being religiously condemned in general, not for any specific action? That is an important kind of release—to be freed of religious guilt and fear.

At the end of today’s passage, John is still trying to convince the reader. Listen, guys, do you understand how unique this guy is? Do you realize that the Son has made the Father known? It is because he has seen the Father, and is close to the Father’s heart, that the Son—and only the Son—is able to make the Father known (1:18). In fact, that’s Jesus’ job: to be the Revealer. I’ll let you know some of the things he said and did, and by the time we reach the end of the book, I hope you know that this is the guy who has opened up the way to heaven. He has offered people a way to survive death and enter into eternal life (11:26). Through him all things were made, and through him can all people be saved. There is nothing more important for you to know. This is God’s outreach to humanity. Don’t harden your heart to this message. This is the good news.

The light of the world has come into the world and lived a human life. The darkness could not tolerate him, and attempted to snuff him out, but he rose from the dead, and reigns on high now. The Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, has now made the Father known to us. We no longer need to fear God. We can love God and reflect God’s love outward in our lives. Everything has been changed. The light of the world has come. Can you see it?