

***“Receive and Believe the Word!”***

This is the final message of a series on the Prologue of the Gospel of John, which is found in 1:1-14. That Text is frequently used for Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship Services, so studying it prepares us for Christmas.

Two weeks ago the Scripture concluded with two gloomy observations about how the world and the people of the Holy Land responded to the presence of ***“the Word”*** – the way God created the world, life, and light. **In vs. 10, the world did not recognize *“the Word”***. Then, in vs. 11, ***“his own people did not receive him.”***

In the face of that bad news, today’s Text provides good news about the reception of ***“the Word”***. **Verse 12 states, *“Some, however, did receive him and believed in him; so he gave them the right to become God’s children.”*** That message is extraordinary and unbelievable! All people, who believe in Jesus Christ, are given this ***“right to become God’s children.”*** With the Gospel of John revealing this claim, a question comes to my mind, ***“How can this be?”*** Does that question sound familiar?

Does anyone recall **Luke 1:26-38**? The angel Gabriel announced to Mary how she was going to give birth to ***“the Son of the Most High God.”*** **In Luke 1:34, *“Mary said to the angel, ‘I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?’”*** Gabriel responded in verse 35, ***“The Holy Spirit will come to you, and God’s power will rest upon you. For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God.”***

Strangely enough, the answer to my question about how we can be given ***“the right to become God’s children,”*** seems to have been anticipated by the author of today’s Text. Clarifying, the author wrote in verse 13, ***“They did not become God’s children by natural means, that is, by being born as the children of a human father; God Himself was their Father.”*** Did you notice the explanation in verse 13 was not too different from Gabriel’s answer to Mary’s question?

With that answer to the assumed question, God is not a Detached Cosmic Watchmaker Who is just letting the gears grind away. Instead, the Divine Parent acted through ***“the Word”*** – who is the ultimate expression of God’s Self-Giving and Suffering Love for us. In doing so, humanity is transformed from the Almighty’s enemies into God’s children!

**Verse 14** poetically alludes to God accomplishing this redemption of the human species, by saying, ***“The Word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us. We saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father’s Only Son.”***

“The Word” actually became human! Through him, our Creator experienced the

human condition and suffered the oppression of evil and death. This incarnation of God in Jesus embodied grace – unmerited forgiveness and love, while it revealed the Divine’s purposes – “Truth”.

**The “glory” of the Only Son was Jesus’ embodiment of the faithful and obedient fulfillment of “grace and truth” by giving up his life to bring about reconciliation between God and humanity.** Additionally, we have also been given the much more valuable and permanent life, which belongs to God’s eternal realm. This is, of course, opposite of the way we usually think about “glory” for society encourages us to glorify ourselves. Yet, instead of seeking praise, this **“Word” in the flesh** provides us the opportunity of redemption and citizenship in God’s Kingdom!

This New Life and Relationship with God comes through the Only Son personifying the ultimate expression of the Divine’s Self-Giving and Suffering Love for us in Jesus’ death on the cross and his victory over death in the Resurrection. **Therefore, Christ is shown to bring “glory” through his ultimate self-giving, instead of through self-centeredness.**

As we celebrate Christmas, the question for us is whether or not we will demonstrate Jesus’ **“glory”** through our following his example of self-giving and sacrificial love. During this time, as our Christmas celebration approaches, we are offered the opportunity to remember again God’s wondrous work, as it was described in the Prologue to the Gospel of John, chapter 1, verses 1-14. Will we reveal the Word’s – the Son of God’s “glory” – the self-giving and suffering love of God – the means through which Jesus provides us **“the right to become God’s children”**? Will we show all that by comforting and welcoming everyone – the powerless, the oppressed, the poor, the outcasts, and even those seen by many as “sinners”? The United Church of Christ’s “God Is Still Speaking” focus, Round Grove United Church’s emphasis on radical hospitality and love, and our support of Christian Community Action and of many other benevolences are just some of the ways we are called to demonstrate our **Special Relationship with our Divine Parent and with God’s “Word” in the flesh – the Son, Jesus the Christ!**

Will we intentionally follow the example of Jesus Christ? He showed **“his glory”** when he enabled all people to have **“the right to become God’s children”** through his embodiment of God’s Self-Giving and Suffering Love. Will you and I join him in showing “his glory” by being his and God’s agents or messengers, who reveal this Good News and also invite all persons to share “the right to become God’s children”?

**Let us unite in showing the joy we have because we are children of God through the “glory” of “the Word” who “became a human being” – Jesus the Christ – “the Son of the Most High God”!** Amen.