

John 1:1-18  
January 2, 2022

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Word made Flesh that lives among us. Amen.

A good movie or book always have something in common. They grab your attention early and continue to do so throughout as the story plays out across the screen or pages.

The gospel of John does just that. We have an entirely version of the Christmas story in the first chapter of John. There is no angel or shepherds. There is Mary or Joseph. Not even a babe in a manger. Yet, John wastes no time in drawing you into the good news of the Word made flesh and who that Word is. He is none other than God and was with God at the beginning of creation. This Word became flesh and lived among us. Through his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

So many themes early on to draw us in to the Father's heart, in which the Son has made known. One that caught my attention is the repetition of the word "grace." John uses it four times in his gospel. All four in this first chapter, thus setting up all that is to come. If we want to know what this grace is revealed through the Word made flesh, then settle in, hold on, and watch the story of God in Christ Jesus unfold before your very eyes. Pastor and one of my former professors Paul Baglyos writes:

The biblical and theological meaning of grace is "love freely and generously given without obligation and beyond all expectation." Grace, in this sense, is the character and activity of God in relation to human beings. The most profound demonstration of God's grace is the birth of Jesus Christ, God's own Son, in the flesh and blood of humanity. God's participation in our humanity, by sharing our life in the world, testifies to God's desire for deep personal connection with all human beings. This is grace, says the gospel writer John, "grace upon grace." (ELCA Faith Lens; January 2, 2022, Alpine Angels of Grace)

So, what is that grace lived out through the life of the Word made flesh. Let's look:

- It is Jesus turning water into wine, the first sign in John's gospel. An abundance of the best wine for the wedding feast. (Chapter 2)
- It God loving the world so much, even when the world lived in darkness and did not know God, that God sent God's son so that all may have eternal life. God sent God's Son not to condemn the world, but to save the world. (3:16-17)
- Samaritan woman at the well. An outsider, foreigner, Israel's enemy, a woman. Jesus extends her grace and an invitation to receive the Living Water. (Chapter 4)
- Healing of the royal official's son, second sign. (4:46-54)

- Healing on the sabbath of the man who had been ill for 38 years resulting in the ability of the man to get up and walk. (5:5-8)
- Feeding of the five thousand ... abundant food for all (6:1-14)
- Promise, "I am the bread of heaven, whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. I will raise them up on the last day, they shall have eternal life." (6:35-40)
- Healing of the blind man (9:1-12)
- Words of promise, "I am the gate. Whoever enters will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. I came so they may have life and have it abundantly." (10:7-10)
- "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep" (10:11)
- Raising of Lazarus from the dead (Chapter 11)
  - Weeping by his tomb
  - "I am the resurrection and life. Those who believe in me, though they die, will live."
- Washing of the disciples' feet (13:1-11)
- Going to prepare a place for us and then the promise he will come again and take us to himself. Where I am, you will be. (14:1-7)
- Giving of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit to teach and remind us of everything Jesus said. To be the continuing presence of the Word made flesh among us, even after his death, resurrection, and ascension. (14:16,26)
- Calling disciples friends and no longer servants. I chose you! You did not choose me. (15:14-17)
- Praying for disciples and for all who will come to believe in him prior to his death. (Chapter 17)
- Laying down his life – his glorification. (Chapter 19)
- Resurrection to new life
- Revealing himself to the disciples huddled in fear and extending them grace upon grace, "Peace be with you." Not condemnation for their denial, abandonment, failure. But rather, peace and his presence. (Chapter 20)

This is grace. This is the Word made flesh. This is God. This is the God's heart, which the only Son has made known. So where have you seen grace? Where has the Word of God made flesh and lived among us or who "moved into the neighborhood" as *The Message* translation writes made himself known, revealed the glory of God? How has this grace changed you?

Because that seems to be what John is getting at. This new thing God has done in the Word made flesh makes a difference. It transforms us. We become children of God living in the abundance of grace and love.

Years ago, while on internship, one of those beloved, precious children of God shared with me in the final days of his life how this grace upon grace changed his life. Once he was afraid of God. Once he was afraid, he was not good enough for God. Once he thought God could never

forgive him for some of what he had done earlier in his life. Once he was afraid of death. But then grace upon grace grabbed hold of him as it met him through the words of a friend who had invited him to attend worship at his church. It took a bit of nudging by the friend but finally through the Spirit's gentle pull he went to worship and heard the gospel of good news for all people. This Word made Flesh was sent out of God's love. This Word made flesh came to save and not to condemn. This Word made Flesh welcomed the lonely, outcast, sick and sinners. This Word made flesh was not far off, but made his home among humanity, settled into the neighborhood, lived among us.

Grace upon grace through the One who gave his life so that we might live, the one who prepared a place for us and will come again to take us to himself, this One that reveals grace upon grace moved into that man's heart and forever changed it. In one of those final discussions, this man confessed even after Jesus chose him and transformed his life, he was not perfect. He made mistakes and did not always love his neighbor as God had so loved him. Yet, it was grace upon grace, the love and promises of God freely given without obligation and beyond all expectation that continued to guide and be a light to his life and interaction with others. He tried his utmost best to extend grace upon grace knowing that through the invitation of a friend, the working of the Holy Spirit, this grace had changed him and so could his actions, his words, the grace of God revealed through the Word made flesh that made his home within him change the life of another and they too could experience the Word made Flesh and grace upon grace.