

# ***Our Eyes Have Seen***

John 1:1-18

Sermon by Dan Schrock

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

*<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God,  
whose name was John.  
<sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify to the light,  
so that all might believe through him.  
<sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light,  
but he came to testify to the light.  
<sup>9</sup>The true light,  
which enlightens everyone,  
was coming into the world.  
<sup>10</sup>He was in the world,  
and the world came into being through him;  
yet the world did not know him.  
<sup>11</sup>He came to what was his own,  
and his own people did not accept him.  
<sup>12</sup>But to all who received him,  
who believed in his name,  
he gave power to become children of God,  
<sup>13</sup>who were born,  
not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man,  
but of God.  
<sup>14</sup>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.*

You and I have seen the glory of Jesus Christ. That is the remarkable affirmation of verse 14 from this remarkable beginning of the gospel of John. We have seen the glory of Jesus, the glory as of a father's only son.

Many years ago I had the joy of becoming acquainted with Karen, a mother, and with her grown up and only daughter, Jill. As I talked with them individually, and occasionally with them together in the same room, I quickly found out that Karen had poured all her motherly love and

affection into Jill, her only daughter. If I ran into Karen at church and asked her how Jill was doing, I could usually count on a long conversation, because her daughter was one of Karen's favorite topics of conversation. She'd talk about Karen's first teaching job in the local public school, about Karen and her husband, about Karen's cat, Karen's house, Karen's struggles to find a satisfactory church. On and on it went, and in those motherly eyes I saw deep joy and fulsome delight. She had poured everything she had into her one daughter.

Whenever I talked with Jill, I saw the other side of this intimate relationship. As an only child, she had grown up basking in the warm love of her mother. I suppose it's possible that as a child she had occasionally found her mom's love a wee bit suffocating, but now in adulthood Jill had only good things to say about her mother. She and her mother could go out for coffee and talk about nearly any subject for hours on end. They trusted each other, valued each other, respected each other, celebrated each other. In a way wonderful to watch, Jill was the glory of Karen, and Karen was the glory of Jill.

In a more exalted and perfect way, according to the prologue of John, this is the kind of relationship that Jesus had with God. As the only son, Jesus enjoyed a relationship of complete intimacy with God. These two persons had lived together since the beginning of time, the son in God and God in the son, and they were in such complete harmony with each other that we can say Jesus *was* God. They were unified, sharing the same will and the same missiological strategy. They had worked together to create everything you see in creation—day lilies and tulip trees, earthworms and nematodes, kingfishers and red-tailed hawks.

But that was not the whole story. This son, this forever Word who always had been with God, then did an astonishing thing. The son took on human flesh and came to live among us: to live with us, in the middle of our messes, in the center of our problems, in the thick of our issues, in the core of our struggles.

To show just how intimate the son became with us, the author of the gospel of John uses a wonderful verb in verse 14: "the Word . . . lived among us." The Greek verb (*eskenōsen*) means "to pitch a tent among." As you can probably guess, this image of God pitching a tent among humanity refers back to the book of Exodus, when the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness and the pillar of God came among them. In Exodus 33:9, for example, whenever Moses entered the tabernacle, God's pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, where God and Moses would speak with each other. Or again in Exodus 40:34, this

same cloud covered the tabernacle, filling it with so much of Yahweh's glory that Moses could not even bear to go inside (v. 35). In both cases, the glory of God came to live in the very center of Israel, to be for Israel the heart and soul of its life.

This, according to the gospel of John, is what happened again in the incarnation of Jesus. The son, in all of his wondrous glory, came to live in the center of our human life, to be our heart and soul. Jesus, in other words, is both the center of creation and the center of humanity. The tragedy in all this, however, is that some people refused to accept Jesus. The gospel of John is painfully aware that many people in the world stubbornly refuse to believe in Jesus. The person or person who wrote this gospel care deeply about the son's mission in the world; yet they are simultaneously aware that even the mission of Jesus sometimes failed. The gospel of John is a sober testimony that as important as mission is, its success is always limited by the freedom of human beings to say no: I will not believe; I will not accept; I will not join.

But that same human freedom sometimes leads to yes. Yes, I will believe! Yes, I will accept! Yes, I will join! The gospel of John was written by one or more of these people who said yes, and one of the main reasons they said yes was because in Jesus they glimpsed the glory of God. Therefore we come back to verse 14: "we have seen his glory, the glory of a father's only son." This happens to be one of the central theological arguments of the gospel of John: if you see Jesus, then you see God. Up to this point in history, the human race has been able to see hints and suggestions that there's a God somewhere. But now in Jesus we can see and learn more about God than ever before. Now in Jesus we can see the fullness of God's glory, the fullness of God's love, the fullness of God's mission.

Of course the community of people who produced the gospel of John in the first century literally saw Jesus in human flesh. They could have told you the precise color of his hair, the peculiar shape of his nose, and the angle of his chin. This is why they could write "we" in verse 14: "we have seen his glory." But even as the gospel of John was being written, these same first generation Christians already realized that they were dying off, and that very soon none of them would be alive anymore who had seen Jesus in the flesh.

Which is why they wrote the gospel of John. This gospel, perhaps even more than Matthew, Mark, and Luke, is deliberately and self-consciously intended to be testimony. The aim of this testimony is to persuade other people to believe in Jesus the way the first generation of Christians believed in Jesus. As 20.31 says, "these [signs] are written so that you [the readers of

this gospel] may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”

The question, of course, is this: how can you help people to believe in Jesus when neither Jesus nor the first generation of Christians who saw him are around any longer? Some people were originally attracted to Jesus because they could see and hear him. But what happens when Jesus is no longer living on the earth? How do you help other people see and hear his glory?

The answer is simple. You tell stories about Jesus. You tell about him turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana (2.1-11). You tell the one about him writing in the dirt and then forgiving a woman caught in adultery (8.3-11). You tell how he made a few loaves and fishes feed a huge group of people, and how he described himself as the bread of life (chapter 6). And in telling these stories, you use some of the same astonishing words and vivid images that he used, and you let these images come alive in the minds of anyone who reads this gospel—images like light (1.5, 3.19-21, 8.12, 12.35-36, 46); childbirth (1.12-13, 3.4-6, 16.21-22); lambs and sheep (1.29, 36, 10.1-18, 25-30, 21.15-17); grains of wheat (12.24-25); washing feet (13.1-17), a crowing rooster 13.38, 18.27); and more than a dozen others. To say it another way, you give people insight. You tell them stories and you let them see with their inner eyes; you let them hear with their inner ears.

Testimony always functions this way. Compare what happens in the gospel of John to what happens in a court of law. This comparison is not at all far-fetched because the gospel of John in fact has two court scenes, both in chapter 18, when Jesus stands on trial, first before the Sanhedrin and then before Pilate. In a court of law, the truth is normally at stake. Did Joe shoot Amanda or didn't he? Did Sarah break the speed limit or not? Did ABC Enterprises Inc. commit graft and mail fraud? When the truth is contested, the usual strategy is to bring forth witnesses who will give testimony, whether written or oral. The purpose of such testimony is to help other people figure out what the truth is and what it is not.

In the gospel of John there are many witnesses who give testimony. For example, the Samaritan woman in chapter 4 becomes a witness who testifies about Jesus to others. The formerly blind man in chapter 9 produces testimony about Jesus. Mary and Peter turn into witnesses in chapter 20. The author of the gospel is clearly a witness who testifies. On and on it goes, a grand parade of witnesses from then until now, a kaleidoscope of testimonies, so that you too, now in the year of our Lord 2008, may see and believe.

Once this happens—once you see and believe—then you too are eligible to join this company and become a witness yourself. You yourself can join the millions who are privileged to say, “we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son.”