

This Christmas Shaw Cable sponsored a promotion called, 'Shaw's Amazing Family Re-union Contest'. Up to ten people could win \$25,000 to bring their scattered family members together for Christmas. One of the spots for the promotion ran something like this, "I'm British and my husband's Italian. Our families have never met for dinner. We think it would be an awesome thing if they could....."

"I'm British and my husband's Italian..." Bring on the cultural stereotypes on both sides of that dinner table and you have the makings of a contest winner. Now if this did turn out to be a winner, the people around the table would all be a bit uptight, at least on the British side. But what they would do is start looking for common reference points. They would start by talking about the contest, and how they heard that their family was chosen, and how the travel arrangements worked out, and how they usually celebrated Christmas. They would talk about the weather and try out sports themes, and so on.

Right here at the beginning, John is reaching out to two groups of people around the table. So he is using words and terms that both groups of people, the Jews and the Greeks, (how is that for an interesting Christmas dinner?) would understand and be able to work with.

'In the beginning was the Word'.

For the Jews, "Word" means God.

For the Greeks, "Word" means, 'the governing power of God that is behind all things'.

So far, so good, everyone is nodding in agreement and understanding.

John goes on. The Word created all things. The Word is the source of light and life for all people. The life giver. Right.

The Word came to the world that he had created (including the world full of people) but the world did not recognize him. The Greeks nod with understanding and sadness, so few people recognize the Word.

The Word came to his own people, and his own people did not receive him. The Jews nod with understanding and sadness. So few of their people had received the Word. Over and over again the prophets of God were rejected.

But, says John, to everyone who opened the door to him, to all people everywhere who believed in him, the Word gave permission to become children of God, true descendants, genuine children of God.

Both groups are still nodding in agreement. Being and living as a child of God is a very good thing. Spiritual birth is healthy.

The Word became flesh!

God became one of us!

And both groups are shocked.

The Word made his dwelling among us, pitched his tent, moved into our neighbourhood.

This is the miracle of Christmas. This is what we believe. We do not believe that the Christmas story is a feel good legend. We believe that the Creator of the universe, became one of his own creatures.

We have struggled to understand and explain this miracle ever since.

Listen to Augustine, the bishop of Hippo:

*Man's maker was made man,
that He, Ruler of the stars, might nurse at His mother's breast;
that the Bread might hunger,
the Fountain thirst,
the Light sleep,
the Way be tired on its journey;
that the Truth might be accused of false witness,
the Teacher be beaten with whips,
the Foundation be suspended on wood;
that Strength might grow weak;
that the Healer might be wounded;
that Life might die.*

Augustine of Hippo, 4th century, from Sermons 191.1

The Word became flesh, and we have **seen** his glory.

Two words to unwrap a bit more.....

The word used here for 'Seen' means 'to behold', to 'view attentively', to contemplate. There is a sense of wonder in this 'seeing'. It is the wonder of a seer

who lets first impressions go and is able to actually see what is in front of her. A student went to art class. The instructor brought out a human skeleton for the class to sketch. The real object was right there in front of him, but every time he put his pencil to the paper he ended up with something you might buy at the Halloween store. To 'see' takes concentration and focus and interest. (from 'Shop Class as Soulcraft')

'Glory' means, 'the thing that stands out' about a person or a thing. It might be the special skill or gift a person has.

Cesar Millan is a Mexican American. Average height and build. He could pass in a crowd and you might never look twice.

Over the last couple of years, dog owners (including a few of us) have 'seen his glory'. Because Cesar is 'the Dog Whisperer'. It's like he can speak 'dog'. He changes the dog's behaviour from terrible to terrific, and he opens the eyes of the owners. Everywhere he goes, he leaves happier dogs and owners behind.

We have seen his glory. We have seen and been amazed at what sets him apart.

And if you are interested and take the time, you too will be amazed.

That is the angle John is working here.

If you will open your eyes and your heart, you will see Jesus' glory. You will see what it is that sets Jesus apart. What it is that is amazing, why we love him, why we worship him.

It is 'one of a kind' glory. You don't see this kind of glory anywhere. It is that the Word is 'full of grace and truth'.

'Grace' (Greek) or (Hesed) Hebrew has at its heart, hospitality. The glory of Jesus is hospitality that is open to everyone.

'Truth' (Greek) or (Faithfulness) Hebrew connects on the point of loyalty, integrity, commitment. The glory of Jesus is loyalty, faithfulness, he will be true to God, he will be true to you and me.

Three Invitations:

First, you are invited too, to 'see his glory'. Until you are amazed and impressed with Jesus' grace and truth, love and faithfulness. Don't assume that you know what Jesus is all about. Pay full attention, look until you see.

We are going to follow this gospel from now till Easter to try to see the glory of God.

Second, you are invited to worship Jesus, to welcome Jesus, to accept Jesus' invitation to become a child of God. Jesus still gives the right to become children of God to anyone at all who welcomes him.

Third, you are invited to imitate Jesus. If you are trying to 'see' him and if you are worshipping him, imitation will come almost naturally. We become like the ones we admire. Fans of Cesar Millan start to pay more attention to their dogs. Young hockey fans grow mullets and tweens all start to look like the Biebs. As we worship the Word

we start to act like him, with open hospitality to others, with faithfulness to God and neighbour. Grace and truth become our glory too.

This last, the imitation of Jesus in small and large ways is how Jesus, through his people is at work to transform our cities.

The Lord be gracious to you.

The Lord be gracious to me.

And all God's people said, Amen.