

**John 1:1-18** (NRSV)

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,<sup>[a]</sup> 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>[b]</sup>

<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,<sup>[c]</sup> 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,<sup>[d]</sup> full of grace and truth. <sup>15</sup>(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.'") <sup>16</sup>From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup>The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son,<sup>[e]</sup> who is close to the Father's heart,<sup>[f]</sup> who has made him known.

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***Redeeming Grace***

When I was quite young, there was a popular expression of affirmation, agreement, even celebration, which was summed up in just one word: **"groovy!"** Oh, sure, it was a word most frequently used among that "hippie" generation – a generation of which some of you have claimed membership!! Doing a little research on the history of this iconic word, I learned that it actually originated in the 1920's jazz culture referring to the "groove" of a piece of music and the resultant feeling of the listeners. By the time *I* was beginning to understand the English language, "Groovy" was dubbed a slang expression, or street language, for "excellent," "highly stimulating," or "attractive." And through the decades that followed, there were other slang expressions of "I agree," or "Well done." Those expressions included, **"Cool!" "Far Out!" "Chill!" "Rad!"** and more recently, **"Snap!"**

But about a decade ago, a new expression came into vogue with the popularization of social media. **"WORD."** (W-O-R-D) It is understandable if you are feeling a bit confused! Youth and young adults would simply say **"word,"** to highlight a truth with which they agreed. The Urban Dictionary says this usage of **WORD** means, "well said," or "I am in agreement."

If you said to your friend, “That dress that Janie is wearing is exactly the right color to accentuate her rosy cheeks.” Your friend might respond, “WORD!”

**Interestingly, that also seemed to be the favorite expression of our gospel-writer, John.**

You see, each of the gospels begins with an account of Jesus’ origins. Mark introduces Jesus to us as an adult, telling us that Jesus was “a man from Nazareth” whose advent fulfills the arrival of God’s salvation as foretold by the prophet Isaiah. Matthew and Luke’s narratives begin earlier still, rooting Jesus’ very conception and birth in the prophecies of old and God’s will to deliver humanity.

John, however, pushes his account of the origin of Jesus, the WORD, back to the beginning of time itself. Before anything else had been created, Jesus was WORD ~ with God, even God. And that WORD brought light and life through creation, and the redemption of creation. The WORD always has been, and always will be. This WORD, as we will soon hear from Matthew and Luke, will become the personal presence of Almighty God among humanity. WORD!

The presence of God ~ WORD ~ in human form, is the “dawn” of redeeming grace,” as Joseph Mohr eloquently described WORD in the third stanza of “Silent Night, Holy Night.” God so desired to be “up close and personal” with the human family, that God came to live, breathe, feel, teach, touch, and love ~ WORD!

*Silent Night, holy night, Son of God, love’s pure light,  
radiant beams from Thy holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace.  
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth. Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.*

The radiant beams of light now come from the newborn infant, the Son of God! This verse of Silent Night contains one of my favorite phrases to describe our Savior: “**love’s pure light.**” So, of course, LOVE is the WORD of the week. And LOVE and GRACE go hand-in-hand. John’s gospel begins with four mentions of “grace,” and then doesn’t mention it again for rest of the book! What John is trying to do here, is to define GRACE in the opening verses, as God’s desire to redeem an intimate relationship with humanity. And then, through telling the stories of Jesus, John shows us what God’s grace looks like, tastes like, smells like, sounds like, and feels like! WORD! Love’s pure light ~ at the birth of a Savior!

God’s face in Jesus Christ has entered the world where it will be kissed by mother Mary, cradled in Joseph’s rough carpenter hands, and washed after the feeding and burping. This is real human life, full humanity wrapped around love’s pure light, shining to pierce the darkness of sin and death. It is a LOVE that redeems us—makes us good with God and makes good on God’s promise to be with us always. WORD! In John’s opening lines, we hear of the presence of Christ from the beginning of time when “let there be light” constituted the first dawn in our faith story.

Made in the image of God, WE are called to nurture relationships that birth, multiply and radiate grace in the world. WE are called to LOVE in the spirit of Christ’s REDEEMING GRACE. What would the world be like if “love’s pure light” was at the center of creation, the center of our faith expressions, the center of our intentional focus? Well, let’s find out. Hold on – here comes our assignment for this week! God has given us each the opportunity and ability to be agents of redeeming grace. So, next time you hear a conversation or

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witness an interaction where motives are less than honorable, do what you can to infuse the relationship with “love’s pure light” to nurture more healthy, Christ-centered relationships. I realize that this is the toughest assignment yet, as it involves risk, stepping out in faith, and putting one’s beliefs on the line. So we had better start praying for one another and for God’s wisdom to guide us. Let me repeat your homework assignment: Next time you hear a conversation or witness an interaction where motives are less than honorable, do what you can to infuse the relationship with “love’s pure light” to nurture more healthy, Christ-centered relationships. WORD! LOVE! GRACE! WORD! Amen.