

Like a Child **[Deeper Sheet 1.18.09]**

If you want to know the premise of John's gospel story, you need not look far. It's there in the airport or at the mall or anywhere moms load themselves down with diaper bags and strollers. Or, if you like, you can find it in the long-awaited embrace between a father and a son. "This is my son. This is one of the best days of my life." Or look at the Spirit of God hovering over the Jordan as Jesus is baptized. "You are my son, whom I love. With you I am well pleased."

John is making sure that people understand the depth and significance of this story of new creation. Again, God is hovering over the broken world and bringing light. God is redeeming all things, here and now, in partnership with people. And for those who recognize and receive the light, the experience is like being a child who is well loved. On the other hand, not everyone recognized and received the light. Which begs the question, "If people missed God's movement then, is it possible that people could miss the movement now?"

John's gospel is full of stories and examples about how people managed to miss the light. For some, facing broken patterns of thinking, believing, and doing was just too much so they changed the subject. Others were made uncomfortable by a love that didn't fit well with their religious labels, expectations, and worldview. They lacked the imagination that God might possibly be more than they could ask or imagine. Still others wanted credentials, but Jesus, as John's good news puts it, keeps calling people back to love. When you catch a glimpse of the light and get caught up in the collaborative story of new creation, it's like being a beloved child.

The story of new creation keeps coming back to love, and the main idea is falling from the lips of loving parents everywhere. "She's the best thing ever." "He's our miracle." "We wouldn't have it any other way." "We're so in love." "My heart is going to explode with joy most of the time." "We've waited for him a long time." Love is the story.

Can you identify a moment or an experience where you didn't recognize God's presence at the time but now, looking back, you can see it plain as day? What kept you from seeing God at the time?

Facing her brokenness is too much to bear, so the woman at the well changes the subject. The Israelites say to the seers, "Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions...stop confronting us with the Holy one of Israel." One of the ways we miss the Light of God's presence is by creating distractions. What distractions do you engage in that cause you to miss God's presence?

The Scriptures and history itself are full of stories of people who have insisted on having God according to their own terms. In other words, God's presence is recognized only as long as it fits our religious boundaries, expectations, or worldviews. In what ways have you sought God on your own terms?

How have you seen God transcend your own labels and expectations?

One of Jesus' most enduring parables is about a father and his two lost sons, often referred to as the parable of the prodigal son. Read Luke 15:11-32. What emotions, thoughts, and observations does this story raise for you?