

Once the world's most wanted man, Pablo Escobar is remembered as the personification of evil. The head of the Medellin Drug Cartel was once described as the seventh richest man in the entire world who controlled 80% of the global cocaine market. In the 1980's Pablo Escobar killed anyone who threatened his way of life. He ordered the assassination of Colombian Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla in 1984 and the presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galan in 1989. Colombian National Police killed Escobar on December 2, 1993. Juan Pablo Escobar, the only son of the drug lord, fled Colombia in 1994. A documentary film made this past year follows Juan Pablo Escobar back to Colombia as he tries to atone for the sins of his father. In the film he says, "Had I followed in my father's footsteps, I would have repeated the same history." In the documentary he is seen writing a letter to the three sons of the presidential candidate Galan, and to the oldest son of Justice Minister Bonilla. In some way the letter struck a cord with the surviving sons. Rodrigo Lara Restrepo, the former minister's son, says: "It was an act of humanity ... and we thought we had to respond with another act of humanity." The sons of the murdered men met with the son of the murderer. At the meeting Juan Pablo Escobar broke the tension and apologized for the sins of his father. It was an act of peace.

In the second chapter of Luke, verses 41-52, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus travel to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. Can you imagine how the holy city and the sacred rituals of the Temple would have fascinated a twelve-year-old boy from a small town? After the festival, on their way home, Mary and Joseph realized that Jesus was not there; "I thought he was with you!" they said to one another.

The Sanhedrin would meet in the temple court to discuss religious and theological questions. Rabbinical students would come, ask questions and take part in the discussion. The Heinrich Hofmann painting, *Christ in the Temple* shows the teenager Jesus standing in the middle of the elders as though he was disclosing new information about the law. But the words of Luke say something different; Jesus was listening to the elders and asking them questions. This is where Mary and Joseph find their son. In her best mother voice, Mary says, "Child, why have you treated us like this?" Then, for first time in the Gospels we hear for the voice of Jesus. "Why were you searching for me? Did you not

know that I must be in my Father's house?" Jesus takes the name father from Joseph and gives it to God. This may have been the first time that Jesus realized just who he was. This discovery didn't cause him to look down on His earthly parents; he went home and was obedient to them. Verse 52 says, "*And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.*" Jesus was growing physically but he was also developing into what he was created to be.

In the musical version of "Peter Pan," Peter and the Lost Boys sing:
*I'll never grow up, never grow up, never grow up,
No sir,
Not I,
Not me,
So there.*

Unlike the Lost Boys of Neverland, all of us get bigger, physical growth happens. In the book of Colossians, the Church of Colossae was being threatened; the threat was more astrological than theological. These Gentile Christians were becoming harder to distinguish from other religions of their day, and the author of Colossians was telling them to grow up. In chapter 3, verse 12, he tells them why, "*As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.*" The ancient Jews were the ones who were chosen by God, were seen as holy in the eyes of God, and were beloved by God. The author of Colossians makes a radical claim by extending the gifts God gave the ancient Jews to the gentile church of Colossae. "*There is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!*" The letter says God's love and grace go out to the ends of the earth, and there is no longer a "most favored nation" status. The letter tells the Church of Colossae to grow up, clothe themselves in love and become what they were created to be.

The beginning of John is not a certain event in time like the birth of Jesus, as recorded in Matthew and Luke. It is also not the start of Jesus' ministry, as in the book of Mark. John begins with the cosmic pre-existence of the Word with God. This is outside our normal understanding of time. But it focuses our attention on the rest of the story in

the Gospel, the story about the very character of God and how God makes His God-self known to the world through the life and of Jesus.

When the Word came into this world, it didn't come to Rome, or Greece, or Egypt, or to the Eastern Empires. The word came to God's people who lived in God's land; Jesus came to Bethlehem. Jesus should have been coming to a land that would welcome him with open arms, with the front door wide open. The people were prepared for this opportunity but then, like so many of us, when it arrived they refused to take hold of it. Many of us never realize the possibilities and the gifts God has in store for us. I believe God is preparing all of us for something and this preparation continues throughout our life. It may not be some great act or achievement; it could be some small mundane thing that we do for someone else. Like helping prepare a child for life; or speaking a word that may stop someone from ruining his or her life. It may be something we do really well that makes a difference in the life of a brother or sister, or may be we touch many lives with the work of our hands, our voice, and our minds. God is preparing all of us for something but sometimes we refuse the task, we look the other way when the opportunity comes along.

All of us are the children of God because He created us in His image. But only some experience the depth and intimacy of a relationship with God. The Gospel of John claims that we enter into this relationship through Christ.

God's Word became flesh and walked among us in the person of Jesus. Jesus was seen as the glory of God full of grace and truth. The Greek translation for the Word is Logos and this eternal Logos completely enters this human time-bound sphere by becoming a man. The Logos became flesh, bone, hair, tissue, and everything else that makes up our human bodies. The story of Jesus is the story of God's Word becoming flesh but it is also the story of Jesus being here, with us and within us. This is when we see His glory full of the grace and truth of God. This is what John calls the grace upon grace that we receive as the body of Christ. The phrase grace upon grace literally translated from the Greek means grace instead of grace. The abundance of God's gift never ends; it is continually being renewed according to our needs. It's like going to

Church Camp in Rocky Mountain National Park for the first time and as you drive up Trail Ridge Road you see one amazing vista after another. In Christ we find one wonder after another. We find that the world is full of God's wonders. The Word became flesh and lives within us and our task is to clothe ourselves in love and become what we were created to be by being Christ to the least of these.

Remember the story of Juan Pablo Escobar, the son of the most feared man in all of Colombia, who apologized for the terrible sins of his father. Now remember it in the light of the passage from Colossians.

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

Benediction:

Juan Pablo became what he was meant to be, a peacemaker. May we also, in this New Year, be who we were created to be, clothing ourselves in compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience and above all, with love.