

AS ONE AT TEN

SERMON SCRIPT: John 1 vs 1-18 - GRACE AND TRUTH

(values of St Swithin's) - 28TH June 2020

John 1 is one of the most well-loved and theologically rich passages in scripture. It's often read at Carol services reminding us that Jesus, the Son of God came to earth in human form, to dwell with us, and bring us into relationship with Him.

This morning we come to the passage to consider two more values which are central for us as a church – Grace and Truth, focussing on verse 14; “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Grace and truth are not just random values for us that have been conjured out of thin air by Tim or the PCC. Their meaning sums up everything the Lord Jesus is and does. They are values that we can confidently build on as a church family, as Disciples of Christ in the community of Walcot, around Bath and with our neighbours, friends and work colleagues.

So, we have simply two questions to think about in the next few minutes - what does it mean for us to be a church

1. Built on Grace?

And what does it mean to be a church

2. Built on Truth?

Firstly...what does it mean to be a church BUILT ON GRACE? Sometimes when we think of someone who is full of grace we think of a dancer, like my Royal Ballet trained friend Katy who when she pirouettes around my kitchen is light on her feet and beautiful to watch.

This of course isn't what John means.

Verse 14 tells us that in Jesus, God himself literally came to pitch his tent in the midst of humanity, with people. To live among us, not as God dwelt with his people as a cloud, or by fire in the Old Testament, but in a

personal way – in the flesh. As one writer says...Jesus is God himself, with skin on.

And Jesus, the Word made flesh reflects the glory of God in every way. He is overflowing with goodness and unconditional love for all people, for all time. If we want to know what God is like, we look to Jesus, summed up as full of Grace and truth. In Exodus 34 God appears before Moses in a cloud, and passes in front of him showing Him his glory and his character – “The Lord is compassionate, and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin, and yet not leaving the guilty unpunished.” God’s beautiful grace filled character is seen entirely in Jesus Christ.

Imagine a trapeze artist. Well trained, and whose job night after night is to climb to the highest point of a circus tent and swinging across the sky, jumping and tumbling as they go. No matter how hard they prepare and work, there will always be mistakes which is why there is always a net to catch them if they fall. This is a helpful picture of God’s grace – his love for us is so huge, so unconditional that whatever mistakes we make he will always be there to catch us if we fall. His love for us is so generous, goes far beyond our frequent mess ups and mistakes and the net of his love is there for us always, even though we don’t deserve it.

Grace is perfectly demonstrated everywhere in scripture – by grace God creates all things, he calls Israel to be his people, he rescues them and gifted them with His law to enable them to live for Him – and so it goes on – pointing finally to Jesus in whom the fullness of God’s grace is demonstrated perfectly. Through his sacrificial death, we receive his undeserved love and favour for all eternity!

Verse 16 and 17 sum it up, “Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” Because of the fullness of Grace in Christ we have grace heaped upon us – grace on top of grace on top of grace - the overflowing fountain of Christ’s Grace will never run dry.

That Grace so generously bestowed on us is the same grace that we as St Swithin’s church are called to build on and to demonstrate. Our love for others should never run dry – we should be a church that loves, forgives, welcomes, befriends, accepts, encourages, listens and practically cares as

well as at times lovingly corrects and challenges one another to grow in Christlikeness.

But, as a Grace filled church we are also called to be BUILT ON TRUTH.

Jesus is truth. This truthfulness relates to the character of God. 24 times in John's writings he speaks of God as truth. Isaiah describes God as the one True God, Proverbs describes how God hates lies and David describes how God desires truth in us. Truth is central to the character of God, is embodied in the person of Jesus and as his children we are called to live as people of the Truth.

As we begin to comprehend the Grace of Christ, we begin understand the truth about ourselves and our world. A little girl had a huge fight with her brother. When her mother came in, she said "why did you let the devil put it in your heart to pull your brothers hair and kick him in the shins?" The little girl thought for a moment and said, "Well maybe the devil put it in my head to pull my brothers hair, but kicking him in the shins was my own idea." She had already begun to see the truth about herself. As we recognise the grace of Christ, we begin to recognise ourselves as sinners, and acknowledge our need of a saviour. Truth is both revealed and understood through Christ.

We often say that we live in a world where increasingly truth is relative – "what's true for me may not be true for you." People are interested in spirituality, but often on their own terms. As a church therefore Jesus needs to be our start and ending point as does God's Word which scriptures tells us is "god breathed" revealing His plan for His world through his son.

Since Jesus is the embodiment of truth, as we read books and maybe listen to podcasts or sermons we need to take care to prayerfully weigh up our own views as well as the views of others to ensure that what we believe aligns itself with Christ himself. Jesus himself always treated scripture as God's truth, which reminds us that we too must do the same.

That's why, Word and Spirit go hand in hand...because that is the way we discern truth. Yes, we must apply it sensitively and wisely but there are times as a church when we will have to go against the prevailing culture and say No because God's truth speaks differently. It can be hard, and we could be rejected or regarded as foolish but as we lift our eyes to Jesus we are reminded that he, full of Grace and Truth was rejected, regarded

as foolish and indeed killed for the sake of the truth that humankind carries our greatest problem around with us in our hearts and are desperately in need of a saviour.

CONCLUSION

Our call as a church family is to be a people of Grace and Truth – All Grace, All Truth, all of the Time.

We are to treat others with love and kindness, mercy and compassion – all the time. We are to be a people who don't compromise the Gospel or blend with the world but instead stand firm on Scripture and very lovingly point others to Him alone.

Grace and Truth is who Jesus is, and by the loving work of His Spirit that is who we are and who we will become. That's why they are great values to have as a church family.

As we finish, let me tell you a story...

In the 17th Century, a young boy was born into a Christian family. For the first 6 years of his life he heard the truth of the gospel and was dearly loved. His parents died and the orphan boy went to live with relatives who mistreated him and ridiculed him for his faith in Christ. He couldn't bare the situation so although very young he ran away and joined the navy. Things got worst – His life went downhill. He caused fights, and was whipped many times and treated his comrades badly. Finally, while still young he ran from the navy and fled to Africa where he attached himself to a Portuguese slave trader.

There his life reached the lowest point. He escaped, and became attached to another slave trader as first mate on a ship. Still he lived a depraved life. He stole the ship's whisky and got so drunk he fell overboard. He was close to drowning, but a shipmate harpooned him and got him back on board – for the rest of his life he had a huge scar on his side. Things could not get much worse. Finally, in the midst of a huge storm off the coast of Scotland, after days of pumping water out his boat the young man began to reflect on the verses from scripture he had heard as a boy. John Newton was beautifully and wonderfully converted and discovered a new life in Christ – receiving his grace as he meditated on His truth.

In years to come this is what he wrote.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found;
Was blind but now I see.”

PRAYER

As we say these words again as a prayer, I’m going to pause after each line so that you can bring your own prayer to God and be reminded over of His love and saving Grace through Christ.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found;
Was blind but now I see.”
Amen