

“Grace and Truth”
ASW
Sanctuary 30-12-18

Readings:

Psalm 19

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.
There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.
Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun,
which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is hidden from its heat.

The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul.
The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.
The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.
The ordinances of the LORD are sure
and altogether righteous.
They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the comb.

By them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
Who can discern his errors?
Forgive my hidden faults.
Keep your servant also from willful sins;
may they not rule over me.
Then will I be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

John 1: 14-18

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' " From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

Sermon text

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of **grace and truth.**"

This is the 6th in this series of reflections on John 1: 1-18, that we have been studying in the morning services this Advent. We have looked at:

1. The Word- NR
 - I. Word / Logos - The "God foundation"
 - II. Present before the beginning
 - III. Creating the world that he would later come to save
2. Life - WES
3. Light - Sarah
4. Children of God – NR
 - I. The three responses
 1. US: When we believe ("to those who did believe")
 2. GOD: God gives the chance to become
 3. US: Its free – we go and tell others
5. God with us - MS
6. Grace and Truth NR – today

I want to make two observations before we start:

I watched the film "Philomena" last night. This is the true story of an Irish girl, unexpectedly pregnant, whose child was taken from her, and who then sought to discover what had happened to him. We saw the worst face of religion – judgemental, excluding, and vindictive. Some still think that this is what God is like...

I also want to acknowledge our human experience that prays, either actually or metaphorically on our knees, "Lord I have done it again. I am sorry..."

Psalm 19 is an Old Testament "heart song". We read it – inevitably – in the light of Jesus Christ – through New Testament eyes. I would like to try and use our imagination, and get into the mind of the writer, thought to be King David – a man blessed by God and of great faith.

We see his journey of thought. First there is adoration and wonder – "The heavens declare....". Imagine him looking at a glorious sunset, and then a night sky with no moon or clouds – the breathtaking sight of the Milky Way – a slash of twinkling brightness across the sky. As our eyes adjust, we would see more and more stars. We imagine the glory of a mighty knight, mounted on his horse, a champion with fanfare and might. And power – exposing everything – a truly magnificent sight.

We then ponder on the qualities of this God we are adoring – perfection. Everything is in superlatives, all beyond price.

Then we pause. “Oh oh!” “By them is your servant warned”. “In this presence of perfection, I am a sinful person. I am grey alongside this pure white. I must have hidden faults – I am sorry. On no, hang on! – and how about those things I know I do wrong? Forgive me! Free me from those things that have a hold on me – then I will be blameless.

There is an honesty and authenticity about this psalm that reflects our human experience.

And his final verse is a comment that reveals his realisation that this has been a good meditation.

It is from this viewpoint that we now consider grace and truth.

I was in Lambeth recently at a communion service. It was the church’s week of “Christ the King” – just before Advent. I had walked along the embankment and looked across at the Houses of Parliament. Theresa May was starting to argue her Brexit plan. I had prayed for her – somehow, I had felt, we were witnessing momentous times. (We are, aren’t we? The biggest constitutional crisis for many years, with so much in doubt, and worry. Where is the way ahead?). The priest said in that Communion service, in the chapel where Cranmer wrote the book of common prayer, that “**Christ the King is the one truth in a world full of uncertainties.**

Truth, hope, strength, Refuge. So “we will not fear, even though the mountains have moved (after psalm 46).

This **truth** is the unique fact of Christianity. The Word became Flesh. In the world’s time line, from creation (millions of years ago – yes there is a creator) to the end times (this will happen one day, and we believe that Jesus will come again) Jesus Christ is the one man that changed things: from the OT era, when God’s presence on earth was in the care of one people – Israel, human-kind was not able to obey God on its own, and many prophets foretold Jesus; TO the NT era when Jesus opens the way back to God, tells us to take this Gospel to all nations, and promises to be with us – “I will send the Holy Spirit – wait for him” .

Patrick’s book “The Word from the throne”¹ draws key themes from John’s writings – his Gospel, letters and Revelation. One such theme is the couplet of grace and **truth**. They are related and, more, they define each other. Of **Truth** John writes that Jesus’s ministry:

1. tells the **truth** about God the Father² – “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was, is, and is to come” (Rev 4:8),
2. the **truth** about Jesus himself³ – “John is more than content to display the full humanity of Jesus through his bodily needs, not baulking at the limitations which his body placed on his Godhead”, and “alone in the Gospels John consistently describes Jesus’s earthly life in the context of having pre-existed as the Word and of returning to the Father from whom he came”,
3. tells the **truth** about humanity⁴ – “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1: 8)

¹ Patrick Whitworth: “The Word from the throne” ISBN 9-780755-494292

² Ibid page 39

³ Ibid page 41, 42

⁴ Ibid page 45

Grace is the undeserved love of God. In John's letters he says that "we did not love God. He first loved us" (1 John 4: 10). Is not this our amazing experience of faith? Even when we are at rock bottom we can realise that "there is never no hope".

From **truth** we derive the Principles of living, that tell of the ground rules. **Grace** defines the need for **compassion**. Patrick writes "without grace, truth can become hard and condemning, but equally grace without truth can become insipid and cloying"⁵

Jesus is countercultural.

He came to proclaim God's gold standard.

The more we know God, in Jesus name, the more we understand this gift of grace
And the more we see our need for it.

And so the more we can be transformed (by the renewing of our minds - Romans 12: 1-2)

Word, life, light, children of God...there is no "persona" here

The wonder:

we are forgiven sinners, "sinners with L plates on"

We help each other see...

He came full of grace and truth

To give us life – life to the full (John 10:10)

Amen

NR

3-1-19

⁵ Ibid page 52