

The only son of a very wealthy man had his 21st birthday on Christmas Day. His mother gave him some gold cufflinks and gold pens His uncle and aunt bought him a set of top of the range golf clubs. He expected to receive a sports car from his Dad, as he had dropped many heavy hints over the year. Instead his Dad told him that he loved him and handed him a wrapped-up present. When he opened it, he found it to be a box containing a leather bound Bible, with his name inscribed on the spine. Angrily the young man tossed the box and Bible aside and stormed out saying: “With all your money, all you can give me is a Bible!” They never spoke again, despite the fact that the young man’s father tried hard to contact him. Years later, he got a call from his Uncle to say his Dad had died, leaving him everything. As he was going through his father’s belongings, he found that Bible still in its box. Curious, he took the Bible out of the box and opened it. The page fell open at a passage his father had marked. As he looked at the page, he noticed that his Dad had underlined Mt. 7:11, “If you then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father give what is good to those who ask Him.” As he read it, a car key fell from inside the Bible. It had a tag with the dealer’s name on it – for the sports car that he had wanted years earlier. On the tag beside the date of his 21st birthday he read the words: “Paid in full love, Dad.”

This morning’s gospel reading is taken from the beginning of the Gospel of John, is all about God revealing himself and us knowing him. There is no crib scene, no shepherds, angels or wise men but it is just as powerful message nevertheless. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” God becoming man, the Creator becoming a part of the created. How special this is, how much it shows that God loves us. He loved us so much that he became one of us, he came to experience the things that we experience in our daily lives. But there is another side to this glorious story of Jesus becoming human and dwelling among us. Not only is it a way that God comes to know us better, now we are able to know God better. Now he is revealed and we are able to understand him in a way that we haven’t before.

It begins in verse 10 by talking about the world not recognizing its creator, something that is not

at all uncommon. But then it shares that there is life, a glorious life for those who do recognize and accept him. And when we recognize him we receive grace and truth. Mostly, the scripture tell us that when we know Jesus, we know God. So it’s all about knowing God. And we know God through Jesus

Throughout the history of God’s people, humanity, tends to miss recognizing God. It happens again and again throughout the Bible. It culminates in the religious leaders in Jesus’ day having Jesus killed, but it starts much earlier than that. In the Old Testament, we see the nation of Israel continue to turn from God and worship other gods. It happens when Aaron builds a golden calf and proclaims it the God who rescued them out of Egypt. It continues through the lives of the kings as they so often worship other gods and listen to prophets who tell them what they want to hear and not what God wants to tell them. God sends prophet after prophet and the people of God refuse to listen to these prophets, and have them hunted down. And then God does the miraculous and sends his very son, and the religious leaders of the day want nothing to do with him. They are too focused on their religious life and rituals and expectations to recognize the very God who they have been worshipping.

But it doesn’t end with the Pharisees, for when we look at the New Testament, Acts and the epistles, we discover that even Jesus’ disciples don’t always recognize what it is that he is doing in the world through the Holy Spirit. Therefore we have councils and meetings of the apostles as they decide whether to allow gentiles to become Christian without having to follow the Jewish laws. Again, God is working in the world, spreading the good news to the world in a new way, and God’s own people don’t recognize him right away. The difference is that the New Testament church sought to recognize him and therefore spent time in prayer and discussion with each other so that they could recognise him in the things going on in their world.

God’s people, and the people of the world, don’t always recognize their God when he works in the world. Partly this is because he doesn’t ever do exactly what you’d expect... instead of coming as a king he comes as a refugee baby. Instead of conquering the Roman Empire, he allows himself to be crucified by them. But partly, it is because God’s people, and the people of the world aren’t truly focused on the things of God,

but rather on the things of the world. When power guides your decisions, you are not going to recognize the God who wields his power in the most unusual of ways. When selfishness guides your decisions, you are not going to recognize the God who gave everything of himself for a world that treated him horrifyingly.

But there is hope here also, for John does tell us that there are those who will recognize Christ. There are two words that appear a couple times in this scripture when talking about recognizing Christ. They are grace and truth. Interesting words. Words we don't often spend much time thinking about. But important nevertheless.

Grace and truth first show up in verse 14 as we see God's glory revealed through Jesus, who lived among us, and that glory is full of grace and truth. And then in verse 17 we see that we receive grace and truth through Jesus.

Let's look at what these verses are saying to us. Starting with verse 14: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The Word refers to Jesus and focuses on his wisdom and glory, Flesh refers to human nature. Dwelt in this case means "tabernacled" or "lived" or "set up residence". In the Old Testament we have the tabernacle which is the place where God dwelt. It is the place where God's presence rested among his people. Now his presence is resting in human form through Jesus. And because of this we see his glory. Which is full of grace and truth.

God's grace is his redeeming love. Grace is about God loving his people so much that he brings salvation to them. Truth is something that we see throughout the Bible. But it is not truth in general, there are specific truths that are focused on. Sometimes these truths are the truths of what we are to believe as Christians: that we are all sinners, that Jesus died for our sins, that Jesus rose from the dead, that the Holy Spirit is sent to us, that God loves each of us. In this case, the truth is that God is faithful to his promises. In a way, this wraps up all the truths of the Bible. God is faithful. When he promises something to his people, when he promises something to the world, we know that he will follow through. He always has and always will.

We are then told that we have all received grace upon grace. This tells us that this grace, this redeeming love is endless, it continues and builds upon itself, and we are shown that these are much greater than the laws of Moses, the rules that we live by. They fulfil those laws and again bring grace and truth to us.

What is so important to see in this scripture is that the grace and truth, God's grace of redeeming love and the truth of his faithfulness to his promises are available to all. Jesus didn't just come for you. He didn't just come for those who go to church. He came for all people. He desires for the whole world to recognize him. And we have a part to play in that. God revealed himself through Jesus. God made himself known. And we are the ones who he has been made known to.

Many of us have known him for most of our lives? Many of us learned about him from our parents and our childhood. But there are so many who do not have that opportunity. There are so many who have not grown up in the church and who do not know God. It makes me sad that, when families see the Christmas Crib scene they do not know the real meaning of it. Like the young man in the story I told at the beginning, they miss out on the greatest present they could ever receive. This is a trend that is going to continue in our country and in our world. And we cannot be complacent.

We need to reach out to them in grace and with truth. We need to share the grace of God's unending love. We need to share the truth that God is faithful to his people. We need to let people around us know the wonderful God that we know. We can do this as individuals. We can do this as a church. It means sharing with them about your life and how God has worked in it. If you know God, it's a good message to hear again. It's the good news that is so central to our lives.

Jesus is in the world, he is here and we all came into being through him, let none of us be in the group who do not really see or know Jesus. To all who believe in his name he gives power to become children of God. Let's not miss out on the fullness and the blessings that can come from a personal relationship with Jesus this year. Amen