

## **“Grace and truth” John 1:10-18**

**He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.**

**And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’ ”) For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

May our good Lord Jesus bless you richly this year and every year! Remember our Grace New Year resolution? Every day and in every situation, especially, when we face challenges to frame our perspective by asking that one question:

“Lord, how will you bless me? How will you bless us through this?” But today we are going to reflect on a different question. Why are we here? What are the main, God given reasons for us to be here?

It is not about meetings friendly people. It is not about belonging to a group of like-minded fellows. Those we can do elsewhere in others settings as well. It is not about observing some family traditions, or just because this is what Christians do, or because we have nothing better to do. None of those are good enough answers.

Let me suggest two reasons that John the beloved apostle of Jesus gives us. **Grace and truth.** Put it is this way, we are here to find the truth and to receive God’s grace so that we too can strive to live out that grace in our lives.

We could say that these two define the Church of Christ. God’s truth and God’s grace. If there are groups of people who want to gather under the name of Christ but are not interested in His truth and grace, how can you call them churches?

The same is true for individuals who are indifferent to God’s truth or His grace, or only interested in one of them – how can you call them Christians, the disciples of Jesus in the fullest sense? Then something essential is missing.

**Let's reflect more on these two, on truth and grace.** Let me share with you one more of defining moments in my life. It happened in the beginning of April in 2001. In the middle of night. A dream. One of the scariest dreams I have ever had.

What was in it? I saw a careless, prosperous and relaxed group of seemingly happy, nice, polite people on a sunny day. Playing, conversing, laughing and enjoying their time with ease and seemingly just letting their life happen.

It may as well be a snapshot of Australian society. "Take it easy, mate! No worries!" And I was a part of that group. But then, and this is difficult to put in words, it was somehow revealed to me – so clearly and powerfully, and it scared my heart out of me – that all that seemingly happy and careless picture was false. That all of that was a deception, a nice façade hiding the ugly and terrifying truth.

That all of that "peace, peace" was like a layer put over our senses to hide the truth from us. That we lived in this nice prison, not realising that we are being deceived by some personal evil, that the truth is being hidden from us, stolen from us, that we are lied to and like sheep naively led towards terrible end.

This vision scared me so much... my sleep was over. My night was over. My careless pagan life was over. The search for the truth had begun. But where to find it if not in that place where Jesus Christ reveals it to us, in His Word, in the community of His saints. These really are our only two choices.

Either we listen to the truth of God that He speaks to us in His Word, or we are deceived by the lies that are spread everywhere by the father of lies, the devil. Either we choose truth and wisdom and light and life, or we are enslaved by lies and falsehood, robbed of joy and peace and hope and ruled by the murderer.

Jesus has brought us the truth. He reveals it to us most clearly. He allows us to see the world as it really is, – where we are created by the loving God, who desires to be our Father, to protect us, guide us and bless us.

But at the same time, we are in our fallen state. Humanity has turned away from the very source of life and light and everything good, from their generous Creator. We have rejected Him; we continually ignore Him and push Him away.

It's so good the Holy God is not like us. Our God, our Father, He never gives up on those He loves. On you. Who could endure such hatred and rejection from those you affectionately care for? I would give up. Because it hurts so much.

I don't know about you, but that is my reaction, – it seems easier to exclude someone whom you love from your life, pretend they don't exist, than to continue being hurt by their rejection, by their indifference or even hostility.

I wonder, how does our Triune God feel? For we continually let Him down, again and again. How precious you are to Him, that He patiently endures our apathy, our lukewarmness or our outright rejection of His love and friendship?

Actually, He shows exactly how precious you are to Him. He does it in Jesus Christ, on the cross. On the one hand the Son of God on the cross reveals the frightening depth of our sinfulness, – that this is what it took to overcome it.

On the other hand, it reveals God's incredible love and commitment and passion for us, that He went that far for our sake, for your sake. And now He speaks to you all His promises, that He will be with you always, that He will guide you and protect you, that nothing will separate Him from you and that He will bring you home. To be with Him forever.

This is the truth of Jesus, the Son of God. Magnificent and majestic, as seen in creation. Ugly and shameful in our fallen and entirely corrupted state. Shockingly beautiful and life-changing as revealed through Jesus our Redeemer. Hope-filled and glorious in the light of the age to come.

This is the truth. We can't find, we can't hear it anywhere else. Except from Jesus. As He Himself speaks to us in the midst of His congregation. This truth is not just a tale, or just a bit of information; it is about listening to the One, who has all authority in heaven and on earth, and who uses it – for us. For you!

Blessed you are when you sit at Jesus' feet and drink His truth with big gulps! This is why we are here. This is our mission – to tell this truth to the world. To bring the light of Jesus to people who still live in darkness. Whatever shiny, careless, happy and nice that darkness may appear to our dull and misguided eyes of the flesh.

**But then, we are also here for grace. Grace.** That is strangest of things. It is so strange, that we don't get it. It seems so unnatural to us, that even we, Christians, we really struggle to embrace it and even more, to live by it. It's so hard.

We are used to transactional model, so to speak. You do something and then you receive. But grace turns it upside down. You receive everything, and then you are gently invited to respond and to do something. Grace works the other way around.

We see it most vividly with the Triune God. God's grace begins with God the Father. The Father sends His only-begotten Son to save us. Jesus leaves His divine glory; He humbles Himself and becomes one of us. He pours out His life serving us. In response we hate and mock and persecute Him.

And He, shockingly, delivers Himself into the hand of His enemies, us, and lays down His life to rescue us from our spiritual captivity. For this is where we are in our natural state. Who does that? Who is so unreasonable? It doesn't make sense!

There is no fairness. There is no eye-to-eye. It gets worse. Because of what Jesus did, God the Father embraces us, brings peace to our relationships with Him, He grants us unconditional forgiveness of all our sins, He adopts us as His children.

What a transformation, – from enemies to children! From doomed to destruction to reigning forever with Jesus! We are probably the most ungrateful recipients of all these amazing gifts, the most obtuse recipient of God's grace.

The grace of the Triune God never ceases. He goes on purifying us by the Holy Spirit, He frees us from our captivities, He unites us with Himself and with one another by the most intimate bond of His Spirit. And just imagine how He feels doing all of this and seeing us from inside, our hearts, thoughts, desires...

He never stops this shower of undeserved blessings and care, never. And only when the light of Christ's truth shines on us, only when the darkness is dispelled, when we begin to realize and experience that we are drowning in this ocean of God's grace, only then He gently instructs us:

"Okay, my beloved, my precious, now go and do! Let this grace transform you and your life. Strive to live as a grace-filled person, for this is who you are. For I love you so much, I cherish and adore you so much... go now and I will bless you!"

You can't receive such grace anywhere else. How strange it is! How undeserved. It is offensive for our old self, for it is not of our doing, we didn't merit it, we didn't deserve it, we are not in control, this God is just flooding us with His grace.

Then we begin to see the world through this grace, and this grace begins to shape our attitudes and actions. Gradually, baby step after baby step we begin to live as people of grace. What does it look like? It looks and feels strange. Like grace.

When we stop caring about fairness and justice for us. Yes! You heard it right. When instead we care so much more about opportunities to surprise others with grace. To extend to them when we so abundantly receive from Jesus.

Then we don't demand anything for ourselves, instead we search for opportunities to bless others, to share the goodness of our God. Then we don't try to repay with what is justly deserved, instead we pray and bless where we are treated miserably.

Then we try to explain the actions and motives of others in the most charitable way, seeing everyone as being in a desperate need of the same grace that we so richly receive. Then we strive to be gentle and patient.

Then we breathe and live to show the grace of Jesus to others. Our care and kindness become more and more undeserved and unconditional. Then we rush to ask for forgiveness if we have hurt others, even if unintentionally, then we hurry to forgive, even if our hearts are still bleeding.

For then far more important than our sense of self-righteousness and fairness and justice for us, is our desire to show others what the grace of God is like, how powerful a force; it can change us, our very hearts, it can change everything.

This is why we are here. To keep receiving this grace so that we can keep extending it to others, beginning with our brothers and sisters in Christ, by letting it flow freely to all people whom our Father brings into our lives. This is what the Church of Jesus Christ is about, what our lives are about.

The truth is, that we all do fail. We all will keep failing. We will keep being indifferent to God's truth, lazy and fearful to stand up against lies and falsehood, bowing before the world. Betraying our Lord.

We do fail and we will fail to extend God's grace to others, or even to appreciate it in our lives. Too often even we, Christians, care about us being right and our opponents to receive what they deserve. "We will show them!"

It is a scary thought that our gracious God not only forgives us what we have already done, He knows how many more times I will fail Him in future, how many times I will be lukewarm, indifferent, fearing and wanting to please people more than God, how many more times I will fail Him and sadden Him.

When the Holy Spirit helps us to reflect on these realities of our live, we can take courage in God's promises. Jesus reveals us the truth and He brings us God's grace. He will never stop doing that. His grace is unconditional. It doesn't depend on our goodness, but on His faithfulness. There is no obstacle that will hinder Him.

He comes to speak to you His truth, and to shower over you His grace, week in and week out. He will keep doing it till the very end. Till your work on earth is done and you are ready to see Him, your strange God, your gracious Lord, Jesus Christ.

Amen.