

## "Full of Grace and Truth"

Last week we looked at that profound verse in John's gospel that says, "The Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Jesus, the living Word of God – God speaking to us – became one of us. God with us – Emmanuel.

John continues, "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...". John was one of the 12 disciples of Jesus. He traveled with Jesus, ate with Jesus, witnessed Jesus' miracles and interactions with people. John and his fellow disciples saw the full glory of God in Jesus.

He continues, "We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, *full of grace and truth*" (John 1:14). *Full of grace and truth!* Andy Stanley is one of the most gifted church leaders and communicators of the gospel for our generation. Son of the late Charles Stanley, Andy has a fresh, insightful way of helping us understand the Bible. We have used many of his DVD studies in our adult Sunday School class, and in the small group that Nancy and I have been members of for years. Andy has a sermon called "When Gracie Met Truthie". It's based on John 1:14 and the surrounding verses. I'm going to draw from Andy's sermon for my message today. His sermon is a lot better than mine is going to be, but hopefully I can help us better understand the profound words of John 1:14, that Jesus came among us, *full of grace and truth*.

*More than any other person who ever lived, Jesus' life was marked by love.* Jesus authentically loved people. He also told His disciples, "Love one another, *as I have loved you*" (John 13:34). His followers are to love as He loved! In fact, He said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

But when you see in Scripture how Jesus treated people, and the way He loved them, it seems messy.....inconsistent.....confusing.....and at times even unfair! At times He seems to be *forgiving*; other times He seems to *hold people accountable*. At times He's *harsh*; other times He's *kind*. Sometimes He clearly *points out sin*; other times He seems to *ignore peoples' sin*.

There's a *tension* there. Jesus seems unpredictable. Often His responses to people are surprising, even shocking. Andy Stanley points out that this tension seen in Jesus can make us uncomfortable. The temptation is to try to resolve this. But if we try to eliminate it, we will be giving up something very important.

The Scripture that we're looking at, John 1:14, captures this tension that we see in Jesus, and that *we'll run into* if we try to love as Jesus loves! Again, John 1:14: "We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father.....*full of grace and truth*." Two words here: grace...truth. Truth says, "You're accountable. You're guilty." Grace says, "You're forgiven." Grace says, "You're fine." Truth says, "No, you're not fine. You're broken, and needy." Truth says, "Follow the rules, or else." Grace says, "Mercy is more important than rules."

All of us, in our personalities, tend to lean one way or the other, don't we? Think of your situation growing up. Some of us were brought up by parents who differed in this regard. One was grace, the other was ungrace! That ungrace parent was all truth. Tow the line. Behave or else! The other was "Gracie" – a softie. Much more lenient. If this describes your parent, which one did you like better? The strict one, or the softie? And these parents would argue behind closed doors about how to raise you! Now, if you grew up in a healthy home you got a good dose of each!

By the way, which of these do you tend to be? Gracie, or Truthie? Given our human nature, we tend to come down on the side of *truth* when this applies to *others* – we want to hold them accountable. But we prefer *grace* when we think of how *we* want to be treated! We all tend to lean one way or the other, but Jesus had the full package! The Apostle John saw Jesus navigate through difficult situations, tense moments in His dealings with people, and how He embodied *all* of grace, and *all* of truth.

John continues in his gospel account: "Out of his fullness have we all received grace in place of grace already given" (John 1:16). The Greek here is an odd phrase. It seems to be saying that God's grace is so boundless that when you take some, more keeps gushing in! Out of *God's* overabundance of grace, we've received grace and more grace and more grace!

John 1:17a says, "For the law was given through Moses...". The law: Thou shalt not. Obey these rules, or else. You will be held accountable. The law was *given* through Moses; "grace and truth *came* through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17b). The word "came" means "begotten – was born". Unlimited grace was embodied in the person of Christ.

So in the way Jesus loved people, He was all grace, and all truth. Not a balance between them. He was all of it. He brought all of it to bear on every person He met, in every situation He faced. Just when you thought He'd go one way or the other, He'd surprise or shock people with His response!

Let's look at some examples of this in the gospels. *The Rich Young Ruler*. Do you know the story of the rich, young ruler? It's in 3 of the gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). When you put the 3 accounts together you see that he was young, he was wealthy, and he was a ruler – he had some kind of authority. He had everything going for him. He comes up to Jesus and asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said, "You know the commandments" – and Jesus lists some of the Ten Commandments. "I've kept them all!" the young man replies. It would have been easy for Jesus to say, "Good for you! We need more young men like you who have moral integrity! Just keep on doing what you're doing!" But "Truthie" shows up! Jesus says to him, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven" (Mark 10:21).

Jesus recognized that this man's attachment to money and property and earthly "stuff" got in the way of any spiritual yearnings he may have had. *And Jesus held him accountable*. No following Me unless you're willing to let go of these things!

But "Gracie" also shows up! While Jesus came down hard on him, the Bible also says, "Jesus, looking at him, loved him! (Mark 10:21). And Jesus invites him to be one of His followers: "If you can leave your love for wealth behind, then "Come, follow me" (Mark 10:21).

One of the encounters Jesus had where we see most clearly that Jesus' love included a full measure of both grace and truth is the story of *the woman caught in adultery*. Remember that story? It takes place in the temple in Jerusalem. It's early morning, and Jesus is teaching. Right in the middle of His teaching the religious leaders drag a woman to Him, apparently having caught her right in the act of having sex. (That in itself, says a lot about the attitude and intent of these religious men). They don't care about her; they just want to trap Jesus. "The Law of Moses," they say, "commands that she be stoned to death. What do you say, Jesus?"

He could have reminded them that they didn't have any authority to kill her. Roman law didn't give the Jews that power. But He plays along with them. Okay, go ahead and stone her to death. And any of you without sin, you throw the first stone! Remember what happened? One by one, they get up and leave. So, He's left alone with this woman of questionable morals. Jesus says to her, "Isn't there anyone here to accuse you?" "No one, sir," she replies. "Neither do I condemn you" (John 8:11). *Grace!* Wonderful, overflowing grace! Mercy that she doesn't deserve! But then Jesus says, "Go your way, and from now on do not sin again." He holds her accountable!

"We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, *full of grace and truth*" (John 1:14).

*This is how Jesus treats us, and loves us!* There are times when we need the harsh word of Jesus, the convicting word of Jesus. Situations where He holds us accountable, and reminds us of consequences when we choose the wrong paths. But His amazing grace for us keeps flowing and flowing and flowing. Times when we're broken, and hurting, and guilty – and His mercy and forgiveness are a healing salve.

*And you know what follows: This is how we are to treat and love others.* Always trying to bring *both* truth and grace to every encounter, every situation.

I've tried to think of situations where this has come into play for me. One of the difficult issues for me as a pastor has been whether or not to perform the wedding ceremony for people not connected to the church. The wedding ceremony is a religious ceremony – a Christian ceremony – designed for followers of Jesus. It's not just a civil ceremony, open to anyone. And yet, I want to show grace – to be there for people in that special time of life.

I've taken different approaches over the years. Early on, I did not perform any wedding ceremonies unless the people were involved in the church. I came down on the side of "truth". Follow the rules. Give integrity to the wedding vows. A painful memory is when a couple involved in the church stopped coming. I found out why. They had asked if I would do a wedding ceremony for a couple where the bride or groom had a terminal illness. I apparently

refused, because they were not involved in the church. This sent a very negative message to the church members, so they stopped coming. When they told me this, I was stunned, and embarrassed. Somehow when they had asked me to do the wedding, I just thought of the rules, not their unusual situation. And I thought, how could I have missed this? My lack of compassion wasn't very Jesus like. And I wished I had gladly offered to do their wedding.

Another time when I wonder if I did the best thing was when a parishioner who owned a resort in the Poconos called me one night and asked if I would do a wedding for a couple at the resort. I said no, that I required marriage counseling prior to doing the wedding. The church member almost begged me to do it, but I refused. Truthie showed up. Gracie was absent.

Later in my ministry, I softened my approach, and basically did weddings for anyone who came and wanted to use the church. But some experiences were not pleasant, where non-churched people showed little respect for the spiritual nature of the ceremony, or respect for the church. There was a lot of grace – leniency – but it was like they only wanted to rent me and the church for their wedding day. So in the later years I've only performed wedding ceremonies for people with a connection to the church, or if not, that they would agree to become active in the church before and after the wedding. I think this is a show of both grace, and truth. But I have to admit that I can only think of one case where a couple began to attend the church before the wedding, and were active in the church afterwards. Other times people never followed through.

*Along that same line I've struggled over the years whether or not to do baptisms of infants and children where the family is not involved in the church.* I've gone through stage of baptizing any child, to again, only baptizing children where the parents are active in the church, or commit to becoming involved. Parents, when they have their child baptized, promise God to bring their child under the influence of the church. So it's there in the ritual.

Holding up some requirements, bringing Truthie to bear on the situation, hasn't always led to a pleasant experience! I remember a phone call from a woman who wanted her child baptized. When I told her I would be happy to do that, but first she and her husband had to make some connection to the church, she got angry, and said, "You mean you won't baptize my child!" I assured her I would be glad to do that, if she would do her part in starting to bring the baby under the ministry of the church. She never got beyond the point of thinking I was refusing to baptize her little one. But there have been times when I've broken the rules, and baptized a baby of a couple where the dad was in the military, and was home on leave, and I knew they wouldn't be able to be involved in the church. I have to admit, it felt uneasy – like if you break the rules for them, and not for others, is that fair? But that's the tension of trying to include both grace and truth in the way we treat others.

John 1:14 says, "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. Jesus had the fullness of each, the total package. Jesus shows that fullness of grace and truth in the way He treats us – offering unlimited mercy, but also holding us accountable. And that's what our goal should be in the way we treat others.

