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John 1: 14-18

Sermon Title: Gifted with Grace and Truth

John 1:14-18

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,[a] full of grace and truth. 15 (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ") 16 From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.[b] 17 The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who[c] is close to the Father's heart,[d] who has made him known.

This is the Word of God...

Please pray with me...

We have reached the fourth Sunday of Advent. Christmas is almost here. The last couple of Sundays, Mary Kalesse and I have reminded us of the gifts offered to us with the birth of Jesus. We have talked about the gifts of peace and joy, the gifts of light and life, and today we will explore the gifts of grace and truth.

Our Scripture today says that the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. It continues to share that in Jesus is grace upon grace. Grace is then contrasted with the law. The law was brought with Moses- remember those ten commandments, they were important, but it is as if the writer of John wants to remind us that the law has its limits. The law might tell us right from wrong, but Jesus brings grace and this grace leads us to truth. Also, Jesus is the embodiment of grace and truth. This is deep and we need to unpack the wisdom of this text this morning.

In our society today, we are struggling in my perspective with both grace and truth. We misunderstand grace when we view it as weak or soft. Some people think of grace as the permission to do whatever we want without consequence.

God has never defined grace that way. We have misunderstood truth by thinking that truth is a sharp sword that comes down hard on people when they misbehave. Truth is viewed by some as some objective unemotional idea that people have to deal with whether they like or not.

In other words people assume grace is weakness and truth is sometimes mean, but necessary. The reality is that grace and truth go hand in hand.

When I was four years old, I was trying to figure out my own understanding of grace and truth. One day, I was at a neighbor's house and looked in the neighbor's freezer. I saw a popsicle. I decided that instead of asking for a popsicle I would steal it. I quickly ate the popsicle without anyone noticing, but then I was filled with real guilt. I started walking back to my home across the grass and saw my mom in our backyard. With tears in my eyes, I asked my mom a question.

My question went like this, "Mom, if I tell you something will you promise not to punish me."

My mom was actually smart and gently said in some way. I can't promise there are not consequences to your actions, but you can tell me what happened because I

love you. So I told my mom that I had stolen the popsicle. Now, my mom later told me that she wanted to laugh because she feared I had done something worse, but she knew that this was a teachable moment, so she stayed calm and serious at the same time. She did not choose to punish me, but she did take me over to the neighbors. Little did I know that she had already called the neighbor and told her to keep a straight face. So we walked over and when we knocked on the door, our neighbor answered and with kindness but still a somber look, she accepted my apology. Then I felt much better and my neighbor also reassured me that everything was okay.

You see in this story, what I wanted initially was grace without any consequence at all, but what I needed was both grace and truth. I needed forgiveness, but I also needed to be honest about what I did.

A few more thoughts about truth. I feel like more than any other time in my adult life people are struggling to understand what is true. There are debates about what type of behavior is healthy in our society. There are debates about what is

factually true in the news. It feels like it is hard even for highly educated people to decipher truth, since there are questions about the motives of the leaders of our society.

Historically we are in a time of real mistrust of institutions and leadership. Some mistrust makes sense because of the behavior of authority figures or institutions. As a democracy or a country that at its best seeks to be a democracy, we pride ourselves on our individual ideas and representative leadership, but we are struggling now to trust almost anyone. I think our world desperately needs good leadership in institutions to help bring some stability to our nation and world. We need thoughtful and faithful leadership in many places. What we really need in our world are more people who follow the example of Jesus and seek his help to walk in grace and truth.

Friends, Jesus is the answer to what our world needs. Jesus is God incarnate, God with us. He is the one who came to not so much lay down the law, but instead to offer us grace with truth. Grace and truth do not need to compete with each other. Again, they work hand in hand.

When I think of grace and truth, I keep going back to the wisdom of recovery groups. If you or a loved one have faced recovery or some other form of rehabilitation for health related concerns, you know that grace and truth have to go together.

Grace is the unconditional love of God that offers help to people in need of recovery from let's say alcohol addiction. Grace says, You are loved by God and others and worthy of getting help. Then grace brings a person to a support program, such as an AA group or a Celebrate recovery program. Grace offers relational support for that person.

Grace also shines a light on the person's addiction, so that there is no denying the fact that alcohol is a real problem. This is the truth part. Grace reveals the truth and what folks in recovery teach us is that they must always face the truth of their addiction in order to stay in a posture of receiving the grace that keeps them sober.

Also, if a person in recovery relapses, grace shows up again quickly to invite them back into the same cycle of receiving grace then truth.

Now I am using the example of recovery, but we all have areas in our lives that require grace and truth to work together.

The reality is every close relationship we have requires grace and truth to function well. We all need people in our lives to offer us unconditional love, but who also invite us to be honest with ourselves, especially when we are struggling or in need of help.

Here's the thing though, the best friends are gracious in nature, not overly permissive, but definitely kind and gracious. People who push what they feel is the truth onto others without a heart of unconditional love or grace struggle to keep friends, so if I am to be honest, I would suggest that we begin with grace and let truth organically flow from love.

Grace reminds us that we are all imperfect and make mistakes. Maybe not all of you have stolen popsicles like me, but I bet you've done something almost that bad. And it is okay to make mistakes as long as we acknowledge them and get help when we are struggling.

Our church seeks to be a place of grace, hope, peace, and love. We will make mistakes here. We are not perfect people, but isn't that great. For me a church of grace makes me relax rather than perform.

A church of grace is not saying do whatever you want. Instead it says come as you are and find friendship in your imperfection and through Jesus together we will see the truth of our lives and we will find healing and freedom together.

This is what the Advent and Christmas season are all about. We get to remember that in Jesus we have the gift of grace and truth. As we stay in a place of surrender to his love, we can walk freely in grace and truth. We can also be ambassadors of love to our neighbors and we might even stop stealing their popsicles.

As we talk about grace and truth, I want to remind us that every week as part of our worship service we offer up a prayer of confession. During the prayer we are given time to confess our sins and a corporate prayer of confession mentions our communal sin. Then we take time to pray silently our own personal sins. Finally, we hear the word of grace in the assurance of pardon. We hear the message that God forgives us. The prayer of confession and assurance of pardon is a tangible experience of both grace and truth. We pray to a gracious God who forgives our

sins, but we also repent of sin which requires facing the truth of our lives. Grace and truth go together hand in hand. They are connected in our experience of this prayer.

One final thought, I know that truth is sometimes hard to face. This process of putting grace and truth together is not always easy. Jesus during his life on earth showed us how to walk in grace and truth, but he faced challenges. When you walk in grace and truth you are invited to choose the way of humility and sometimes sacrifice. You choose to walk in step not with the wealthy and powerful, but the poor and oppressed. If we do get lifted into places of power, we need to be careful to remain humble and to lift up the voices of the oppressed. We need to not be afraid to preach love over hate and compassion rather than judgment. When we walk in grace and truth, we will not call people names. We will not detain the innocent. We will show solidarity with the vulnerable.

The Christmas season is a wonderful time to reconnect with loved one and celebrate good things, but it is also a reminder to have the power of God's grace lead us to actions of truth and justice that will heal our world. We can only do this

through the power of God's love that comes to us in Jesus, grace upon grace
forevermore. AMEN.