

June 5, 2016 “When Gracie Met Truthy” John 1:1-14

We have spent 6 weeks or so taking note of some pretty fundamental stuff, that is not without its surprises. Surprises? Yes, like the fact of history, made plain in the New Testament that the word Christian is not the word that was originally used by Jesus or His infant church to describe themselves. The enemies of the infant church first used that word, literally giving it birth, in the city of Antioch where Paul the apostle found himself on trial for preaching and teaching about Jesus and life lived in Him, Jesus being crucified, dead and buried and risen the 3rd day. Those who put Paul on trial or brought charges against him and his “mission team” called Paul etc...Christians. And it is a fact of history...ironically secular history...that the label stuck. However it is also true that that is the reason the term Christian can mean anything from, one who cites the historic creeds as their confession of faith, to one who is very involved in Church leadership saying, she does not believe in God: that she is an atheist.

The Biblical word that describes people like us, the New Testament word, the word Jesus used is “disciples”. We are disciples of Jesus. And if that sounds scary, realize it is because we understand that the word disciple is defined clearly, precisely in the New Testament.

The second big surprise is that the night before Jesus was crucified, the night He was arrested, he told the disciples this. I am paraphrasing but I am not changing the meaning of Jesus words. Jesus said, “Fellows, if you forget everything else, remember this. If you don't do anything else, do this. Love one another. Love one another as I have loved you. By this will people everywhere know you are my disciples...if you love one another.” Jesus did not

say....Do this: baptize people who claim to believe. He did not say...memorize the 10 commandments and live by them. No! Surprise! Jesus said, "Love one another." And He underlined it would make it visible to the world, all the world, that we are disciples of Jesus. He said it would make Him tangible to the world. He said that if we are looking for a practical approach to advancing the cause, and growing the movement, the most practical thing we could do...is loving people the way HE has loved us. It is so simple, we have almost forgotten His dynamic words. Love one another. By this people everywhere will know you are my disciples, if you love one another as I have loved you.

There is one qualification to everything I have said at this point. Jesus was not saying, forget what the Scriptures teach. In fact when He was asked to share what He believed to be the most important of all the commandments you remember what He said? He said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbour as yourself." And then Jesus said, "There is no commandment greater than these." At no time did Jesus say the commandments of God are not important. We are not at liberty to forget the commandments of God as they are given to His people throughout the whole of the canon of Scripture.

And if your mind works like mine you are tempted to say, "But...but that's hard. On the one hand you say, 'love one another'. Do this above everything and on the other you say...observe and keep all the commandments of God. And you are right! That is precisely what I am saying. And while I am not going to say it is hard, I will say it is not for the faint of heart.

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Here is a thought. You may have noticed churches tend to fall into one of two categories. The one kind is very heavy on Biblical teaching. The Bible is quoted at every service. The Bible is read at every meeting. The second category tends to emphasize “the love and the forgiveness of God”. It may at least on the surface seem to be a more kind and generous church. Wrestles to include people. Strives not to offend. In the first category you might get the impression that if you break the rules, you will be asked to leave or at least not made “really” welcome. In the second category you sometimes wonder if ways are being found and mined so that the Bible does not have to apply to all situations. And even within denominational families, ministers may seem to fall into one of those two categories. Category two...the minister is really nice. Category one...He frowns a lot, always seems to be angry about something!

Our human nature, with its tendency toward sin does not make this any easier. We tend to want to choose between the commandments of a Holy God, or His amazing grace and redeeming love. And so we want to pick one of the above. The law of God, or the Grace of God. Biblical truth when it comes to doctrine, or the love of God that welcomes every person, every child, no matter what that person has done, or where that person has spent their time. Playing cards. Dancing. Enjoying banjo music! That is a temptation...yes, I used that word....a temptation we have to resist at all costs.

John the disciple who endorsed Jesus teaching as being the way the disciples had lived from the very beginning, is telling us about the birth of Jesus, and His advent, His coming, His being born into a hostile and sinful world. Hear how John describes the nature of Jesus. “The Word, (and he means the Word of God), The Word

became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

It is a marvellous set of verses. On the one hand John testifies to the divinity of Jesus here. On the other hand John testifies to the humanity of Jesus here. And at the same time John makes it absolutely clear, that to understand Jesus, to come to grips with the Lordship of Jesus one has to understand he was at one and the same time full of the grace of God, and He was full of the truth of God. And if we as Christians (disciples of Jesus) emphasize one of those aspects over the other, something very important is lost to us. Emphasize the grace of God at the expense of the truth of God and it is like eating the entree without ever tasting dessert. Emphasizing the truth of God at the expense of the grace of God...same thing... consuming one part of the meal and never tasting the other part. We are meant to cling to both...the grace of God and the truth of God, because Jesus was and is the embodiment of both...not one or the other. In fact if we embrace the grace of God at the expense of the truth of God, or the truth of God at the expense of the grace of God we flirt with the sin of heresy. Heresy is always guilty of this sin...overemphasis of one aspect of the Biblical truth at the expense of ignoring other aspects of the Biblical truth about God and what He wants of us.

In Jesus not only do we meet the grace of God and the truth of God, we meet in Jesus with those two realities in perfect balance. And as we attempt to live the redeemed life through faith in Jesus we are supposed to strive for that same balance. I will tell you a secret. There is always tension when you try to do that. It is tempting to be legalistic. Quoting the words of Jesus without loving

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like Jesus. Among other things that means you do not expose your heart so much. You won't get hurt. And it is tempting to be committed to the ministry of the grace of God...because then you do not have to worry whether you are getting things “right”. And in both of those cases something important, something eternal, something of the very nature of God and His Kingdom gets lost.

Jesus was full of the grace of God. He was full of the truth of God. And He is the model we are to imitate as we permit the Spirit of God to mold us and shape us. So loving one another does not mean we can be slack about doctrine...Biblical teaching. And loving one another does not mean we are at liberty to build a shell around our hearts so that our hearts don't get broken, or our souls seared. Full of grace. Full of truth. That's why Jesus could commit to the cross. That's how we can commit to loving people sacrificially. To be a Christian, to be a disciple of Jesus is to be “like Jesus”. Full of grace...full of truth.

Let us pray;

Lord we want to serve you. We want to follow you. We strive to do so. Lord to some extent we strive too hard. Help us to let go and let your Spirit direct our way. Choose the path. Open our eyes to Biblical content. Empower us to love those whom you permit us to journey along side. In Jesus name use us to build a part of your Kingdom to the honour and glory of your holy name. Amen