

Phillip Yancey, noted author and Theologian once wrote a book on Grace.

He titled it with a question: What's so amazing about grace?

I think it's just a great question.

You see, we all love the hymn Amazing Grace -
one of the best known hymns in Christendom -
but sometimes I feel like we say that word
without fully understanding it,
or at least without stopping to think about it
and examine it too much.

So we are going to spend some time in the next several minutes
looking at the concept of grace:
how it interacts with us as people of faith,
and what the implications of God's grace are for us
as we try to live out our faith.

Grace, when it comes to the Christian Faith, is defined as:
the free, unmerited favour of God.

That God would be kind to us -
not based on our best behaviour,
not based on our beauty,
not based on our knowledge,
not based on anything
we were able to accomplish of ourselves -
based solely on his desire
to freely give of himself.

And God's kindness is not just kindness as in smiling and politely opening
the door for another,
but kindness as in laying down one's life for another.
Making the sacrifice so that others could live.

God's grace is willing to pay the ultimate price.
God's grace is strong enough to go to the cross for us.
God's grace is inexhaustible.

And we begin to look at what's so amazing about it,
with this passage that we typically read on Christmas Eve

John writes,

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

John's Gospel is just different.

The other Gospels focus on Jesus' real-life, in-our-world, tangible, physical ministry.

They report the things that happened, that people experienced, as Jesus travelled and ministered to the people of Israel.

John, on the other hand,

doesn't follow the same timeline as the other gospels.

I recently heard a preacher I admire say that John's Gospel is kind of like an impressionist painting.

He's giving you the sense of what happened, without being overly hung up on the fine details, and without necessarily moving in a linear

progression.

The other gospels say this happened, then this happened, then Jesus went here, then he healed that person, then he told this parable -

and it's kind of like watching a movie, the scenes build upon each other and there is a logical progression of plot.

I'm not saying there is none of that in John, but it is less of a concern and less of an emphasis for John.

Like that impressionist painting where it is less about the precise details, and more about the over-all impression, emotion and feeling created.

John's Gospel is lyrical and poetic.
Mystical and mysterious.
Beautiful and strange.

John wants us to get the picture that the story of Jesus
isn't limited to his 33 years on Earth.
John wants us to know that Jesus is eternal,
and his story is eternal.

His story is continuing to unfold among us this morning.
And will continue long after the last of us is but a memory.

So he uses images of Jesus as the Word -
the embodiment of all the Scriptures.
And of light - that shines in the darkness
and the darkness cannot even understand it,
so how could the darkness ever put it out?
And of life - that through which all things are created.

This is the story of Jesus' incarnation -
not the story of his birth in terms of his biological birth in this world -
but of his God-becoming-human-ness,
his stepping-out-of-eternity-into-finite-humanity-ness.

John writes,

⁶There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷He came
as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might
believe. ⁸He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.
⁹The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

Because when God becomes a man and steps into our world,
it only makes sense that there would be someone
to go before him declaring
'how lovely on the mountains are the feet of him
who brings good news.'

John was Jesus' cousin,

and had the job of setting the scene,
of preparing the way for the coming of the Christ.
John's job was to witness to the light,
to teach about the light,
to prepare hearts to accept the light.

John writes,

¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹²Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- ¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

John says that even though everything was made through him,
we did not recognize him when he came.
It is a way of saying how fallen and broken we really are -
so far removed from God,
that we cannot recognize God
when he comes to us,
even though we are made in his image,
even though we are his creation.

And yet, for those who did receive him,
God held a special kind of blessing:
the right to become children of God.
We are adopted by him.
Accepted and treated as his own.

John writes,

¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Eugene Peterson,
in his ultra-modern-day language translation of the Bible,
known as The Message,
phrases it this way:
The Word became flesh and blood,

and moved into the neighbourhood.

Which, I admit, I just love.

It gets to the heart of what John is telling us.

God came to us.

God came to meet us where we are at.

At the end of the day, the point is this:

God chose to come to us in the form of Jesus, born in Bethlehem.

God chose to step out of heaven, perfection, eternity.

God chose to step into our world -

our messy, broken, imperfect, impermanent world.

It is the ultimate act of humility.

It is the act of a king taking off his crown,

setting aside his royal robes,

and walking as an equal with the poorest in the land.

God didn't NEED to do this.

Let's be clear - God is entirely sufficient unto Himself.

He doesn't need us.

But He does LOVE us.

So, God CHOSE to do this.

Because grace - the free, unmerited favour of God - seeks us.

Grace seeks us out while we were still sinners,

Grace comes after us when it is still dark

and we are in need of light,

Grace searches for us on the wild hills,

when we are the one who is lost.

Grace leaves the ninety-nine safe and together,

to seek for the one.

God has never desired that any of us, his little ones, should be lost.

The thing about Grace is that it also changes us.

You cannot come into contact with something as beautiful

as the free, unmerited favour of God,

and remain the same.

You can reject it, of course.

God always gives us freedom of conscience,
because that, too, is grace.

It is kind to risk rejection
so that the other has the freedom to choose.

Sure, we can reject God's grace,
but if we recognize and experience God's grace,
if it touches our heart and our lives,
we cannot remain unchanged.

Grace seeks us, even when we are still sinners,
even when we are lost in the darkness.
And Grace calls us to seek others.
To go out searching for the lost,
to meet them where they are at,
and introduce them to grace.

Let us pray.