

Sermon for Sunday 2nd January 2022 (Christmas 2)

On this 9th Day of Christmas - 'Why do we need grace?' from Fr. Mike



Context

As the famous traditional song for this very day reminds us:

'On the 9th day of Christmas my true love sent to me, **9 Ladies Dancing...**'

Symbolically, the nine *fruits of the Spirit*: **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, & self-control.**

And so to our readings:

Ecclesiasticus 24. 1-12; Ephesians 1.3-14; **John 1. [1-9] 10-18**

The central problem that seems to dominate the whole story is this:

Jesus comes to God's people, and God's people do what the rest of the world do – they prefer darkness to light and end up rejecting or ignoring the truth presented. This is the reason why we all need *grace*. Without God we complicate things, and it is only by the grace of God that we become simple once again, and thereby able to live according to the first principles of humanity and faith.

All human life is special in God's sight, but something can happen in this life that adds to its dignity and worth, when we become part of God's special family. Tom Wright helpfully puts it this way: "... this great drama is a play in search of actors, and there are parts for everyone, you and me included."

Here is another nuance: **the grace of God is never static, but always dynamic.**

As our relationship with Christ develops like a dance, and our experience of grace also grows and changes in order to equip us to meet each challenge.

Emmanuel ('God with us')

In Jesus, the previously distant, unknowable, unreachable God has come to reach all people who would receive him and so God *can* be known, deeply and intimately by all people.

Each Christmas we face a new year, and the new era brings with it fresh challenges. In the old way, life is governed by law: people needed to do things whether they wanted to or not, whether they knew the reason or not – because it was either required or even demanded by the Law. But with the coming of Jesus, the Christ, we no longer need to seek to keep the law like slaves, we seek to live as sons and daughters who are *inspired* to keep the law, not because we have to, but because we *want* to. Through Jesus Christ, God the law-giver became God the Father, so that God the judge has become - God the lover of the souls of people.

Fables and Facts

The theologian Kierkegaard has a fable of a king who fell in love with a maid.

When asked, "How shall I declare my love?" his counsellors answered, "Your majesty has only to appear in all the glory of your royal glory before the maid's humble dwelling and she will instantly fall at your feet and be yours."

But it was precisely that fact which troubled the king. He wanted *her* glorification, not his. In return for his love he wanted hers, freely given.

Finally, the king realised love's truth, that freedom for the beloved demanded *equality* with the beloved. So late one night, after all the counsellors of the palace had retired, he slipped out a side door and appeared before the maid's cottage dressed as a servant.

Clearly, the fable is a Christmas story. We are called to obey not God's power, but God's **love**.

God does not want submission to his power. In return for His love, he simply wants our own. God has moved in at Christmas. He pitches his fleshly tent in silence on straw, in a stable, under a star, and the impact is (and continues to be) wonderful. A simple cry from that divine infant's throat pierced the silence of centuries. God's voice could actually be heard coming from human vocal cords. That is the joy of it. God has come to truly be with all of us, unconditionally!

A final parable

There was once a man who moved into a cottage equipped with stove and simple furnishings. As the sharp edge of winter cut across the landscape, the cottage grew cold, as did its occupant. He went out and pulled a few boards off the house to kindle the fire. The fire was warm, nevertheless the house seemed just as cold. More boards came off for a larger fire to warm the now even colder house, which in return required an even larger fire, demanding (yes, you've guessed it!) *more* boards. In a few days the man cursed the weather, cursed the house, cursed the stove, and moved away in search of more continuous and reliable warmth at the earliest opportunity. The raw futility that man felt is the futility of those who try to live the Christian life without Christ. Think back to the timeless gospel according to St. John. He (Christ) is the Word that was in the beginning with God and was God.

Furthermore, he is alive today! To those of us who are drowning he is someone we can always rely upon for support and sustenance. He is someone who, being **'full of grace and truth'** can easily set our feet on dry ground again, who longs to walk with us throughout this New Year of 2022, and beyond. All we need to do is abide in His love, dance to his unique tune, and trust the special gifts he has already so generously presented...

Fr. Mike, 2nd January 2022 (Christmas 2)