

## Christmas Sermon

“The Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth.”

Near the end of Jesus' life the cynical politician Pilate says to Jesus, “What is truth?” Perhaps you, like me, find yourself asking, “Is there such a thing as truth today?” When big scandals blow up in the country or else during elections, both sides claim to be telling the truth and yet contradict each other completely. Truth and right seem to change, depending on what the majority seems to think at the time. IS has its own perverted truths, which make them keen to commit barbarities. Is there any Truth today and is there goodness inside that Truth?

Well, this church has stood here for nearly 1000 years to say, “Yes, there is truth, and it doesn't change.” Generations have come into this church to question this, and, I hope, to get strength from the faith they have found. There is truth which is unchanging, there is a God behind it all who is true and good and noble and pure, and He is in the business of bringing his light into our world, tough, dirty and dark as it is. Christmas marks that extraordinary claim of the Bible that God didn't just look on at the mess in the world, but stepped in, came on-stage, got his hands dirty, and that that event 2000 years ago meant that things can change for the better today - if we invite Him to act. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” and He also said, “The truth will set you free.”

I mentioned before the perverted truths of IS. Nothing can be more dangerous than when religion and political power get fused together; I saw this in southern Africa as I grew up, and it's been in the world as long as long as astute people have seen the attraction of joining the two together. Because it means that “I am right,” and “You are wrong.” And it leads on to me believing that whatever I do is OK because God is on my side in the fight between light and dark.

Very powerful and very attractive - and very dangerous. That is not the sort of Truth the Bible is talking about. That Gospel reading talks about Jesus being full of grace as well as truth. "Full of grace". "Grace" means "God's favour when we don't deserve it", ie mercy; it also means "graciousness". God's Truth is not that hard, bitter self-righteousness that makes other people bash their noses against it and that bruises them. God's Truth is winsome, compassionate and loving.

Christmas' claim is that Christianity is not a set of values or an ideology, a 10 Point list of Do's and Dont's; Christianity is about a Person, Jesus, whom the disciples lived with, questioned, tested out, saw when He was dirty and tired. And at the end of it John, one of Jesus' disciples, could say, "We have seen it: Jesus was full of grace and truth!" God's way of showing Truth was allowing his Son to become vulnerable, first as a baby, then growing up in a normal home, and finally to be vilified, abused and crucified. Jesus was full of grace and truth!

I've been getting to know that Jesus for 40 years. The night before He died He said that I can be his friend, and that's what I'm enjoying. I find my joy and my strength, not from a cold ideology, but from my friendship with Jesus, my God and my friend, full of grace and truth. And I glimpse Him in others too, just as He promised.

Chris van Straaten