

## **Community – Evening Congregation Camp 2021 Truth and Grace in Community**

Last night we explored our first two topics relating to Community  
God made us for community with Him and others  
But we have broken that community by our sin.  
Today we will be looking at how we need truth and grace in Community  
And this is exactly what Jesus brings to us.

Let's pray before we do anything else

Last Sunday, the Victorian Government released a roadmap out of lockdown  
A roadmap designed to sustain the health system  
But also recognizing the negative impact of lockdown on so many in our society  
But more than ever,  
There are increasing divisions in our community  
People who are pro-government say they have done a marvelous job  
And others who are anti-government say they have done a terrible job  
And everyone else in between  
There are anti-vaxxers described as crazy conspiracy nutbags  
And pro-vaxxers described as mindless sheep who believe anything anyone tells them  
These sub communities are becoming more entrenched as time goes on  
There is increasing anger  
There is increasing fear  
There is increasing division  
And that's not just in the wider community  
But also in churches  
Some say the church should defy the government restrictions on meeting in person  
Some say the church should obey the government  
You don't have to spend much time on Facebook to see how much heat there is  
In the dialogue about these issues  
What do we need as we seek to rebuild our community?  
We need Truth and Grace

Two points I want to make today

**Truth and Grace matter in community  
Truth and Grace come through Jesus Christ**

**Firstly, Truth and Grace matter in Community**

**Truth matters because trust matters**

If you want to have a healthy functioning community  
Truth matters  
Because truth is the basis of trust  
And trust is necessary in all relationships  
How can I depend on you if I don't know if you are reliable and trustworthy?

But who gets to determine what truth is

Especially in an age when truth is relative  
What's true for you  
May not be true for me  
So says our age  
Your truth is whatever you feel it is  
As long as our truth doesn't hurt anyone else

One of my favourite episodes of the Simpsons  
Is when the whole town of Springfield decides to adopt Bart Simpson's motto  
"Do what you feel like"  
And it all culminates in the "Do what you feel like festival"  
Everything is going fine  
Until a grandstand collapses injuring people  
The maintenance guy is questioned about not doing his job  
And he says "I didn't feel like it"  
And Marge Simpsons says angrily to him  
"I don't want to judge the rightness of your ego orientation  
But my inner critic says you should have done your job"  
Only to have Ned Flanders correct her saying "No Marge, let's not *should* this fella to death"  
In minutes, the town is in complete chaos  
A poorly maintained ferris wheel comes off its hinges  
And accusations and violence erupt and trust breaks down in their community

You see I think when truth is relative  
Inevitably people do get hurt  
I think it's funny that in an age of relative truth  
During this pandemic we've been told that truth matters  
And absolute truth matters  
All of us need to stand together  
On the truth of such practices as social distancing and face masks and travel restrictions  
In fact if we don't adhere to these truths  
We face judgement in the form of public shaming through media  
Or hefty fines from the police.  
I think for a culture as individualistic and autonomous as we are here in Australia  
These things have been very hard for us to take  
Don't tell me what I should do  
Stop imposing your truth on me

So I think it's very confusing at the moment  
In our society we live by the anthem "Do what you feel" – truth is relative  
Don't judge anyone for their choices  
But now we hear a different cry "Live by the truth" – otherwise we will judge you  
What's the way forward?

The Bible's starting point is that truth is absolute  
Truth is not relative  
Truth is not what we decide  
In fact we are measured against the truth  
Truth is revealed to us from God through Jesus  
Jesus said these well-known verses in John 14

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus is saying that the only way to have a relationship with God  
Is through him

These have been seen as highly offensive words by Jesus  
How dare Jesus be so exclusive in his claim on truth?  
But I invite you to test his claim by looking at his life  
Remember what I said, truth matters because trust matters

You know why you will find it hard to trust me or anyone else for that matter?  
Because eventually at some point you will find out that I am a liar and hypocrite  
And the same applies to you  
Eventually you also will prove to be a liar and a hypocrite  
in some of the things you say and do  
I invite you to read one of the gospels of Jesus in the bible  
And see if he is a liar or a hypocrite  
See if he passes the pub test  
See if the things that come out of his mouth are consistent with his claims  
I think you will find that Jesus is the truth  
Because he is completely trustworthy  
Just as God is trustworthy

### **Truth matters to God because justice matters**

God made the world  
And He made us for community  
But God also expects accountability in community  
Justice is a characteristic of God  
God is righteous in all His dealings with us  
It's only fair then that he appoints someone to judge and that is Jesus

Here is the apostle Paul in Acts 17  
Verse 30

<sup>30</sup>In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. <sup>31</sup>For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

Truth matters to God so everyone will face this day of judgement  
And while that is something that people find objectionable about Christianity  
Imagine a world without justice  
Imagine a world where corruption, violence and negligence had no consequences

Truth matters to our community  
That's why we set up royal commissions and judicial enquiries  
That's why we have a justice system, courts, VCAT

It's extremely comforting that God appoints Jesus as the judge  
You see unlike sinful people  
Jesus is not inconsistent  
Jesus judges in righteousness (that is truth)  
Jesus knows all the truth, no secrets are hidden from Him

Jesus is impartial and not prone to bias  
Jesus is blameless and not corrupt  
Jesus has the right to judge because he is the truth

Not only does truth matter but grace also matters  
**Grace matters because of who we are**

In recent years we've seen the rise of cancel culture  
This is where someone is outed by their community  
As being offensive in some way whether that be racist, sexist,  
or something else which the community finds offensive  
Perpetrators are named and shamed and then they are boycotted  
They're effectively kicked out of professional circles and social circles  
In other words they are cancelled  
Statues of historical figures  
have been torn down and cancelled for their past sins  
Celebrities and high-profile figures have been shamed online  
Cancel Culture has been seen as empowering victims  
Giving them a collective voice against their abusers  
And while it is a good thing to call out sinful behaviour  
There is a dark side to Cancel Culture and people are starting to notice this  
What if you're on the receiving end?  
What if you're the one defined by your past  
What if all your mistakes and indiscretions and secret sins  
Were displayed in front of everyone  
What if you were named and shamed and then cancelled by your community

You see the trouble is  
All of us are guilty when measured against the truth

Paul says in Romans 3:22,23  
<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

The objective standard, the measure of truth all of us are compared with is God himself  
And all of us fall short  
Like an arrow falling short of its target  
We miss the mark because we are sinful people  
We saw that in yesterday's talk  
We are broken by our sin  
We say no to God  
Not only do we reject the truth  
We live by our own truth  
Let's be honest, we often fail to live up to our own subjective truth  
We stand before Jesus the Judge – guilty  
We ought to be cancelled  
Cast out from God's community

Our only hope is grace  
Grace in the bible is God's undeserved kindness or favour  
Grace is often hand in hand with mercy  
Mercy is often described as not getting what you deserve from God – condemnation

Grace is described as getting what you don't deserve which is the righteousness of Jesus  
Grace matters to guilty people like us  
Because all sinners need God's undeserved kindness

### **Grace matters because of who God is**

The Bible is clear that God is full of justice  
God is a Holy God who stands for truth  
In Him there is no sin  
In fact God ought to cancel out sinners like us  
But the Bible shows us that grace is also characteristic of God

In the Old Testament

The Israelites commit a terrible idolatry at Mt Sinai  
While Moses is with God on mountain  
God's people make and worship a golden calf instead of worshipping God  
And God is angry  
Angry enough that He's about to wipe them out from history  
He's about to cancel them  
But He relents and then He says this to Moses

Exodus 34

<sup>6</sup>And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,

This description of God is used in a number of different places in the Old Testament  
God could have and should have cancelled out the Israelites  
Because of their repeated sin against Him and others  
But He doesn't,  
He is the God of grace and mercy

And not only to them but also to us  
God shows everyone His common grace  
Regardless of whether you believe in Him or not  
God is kind towards you  
The very fact of our lives is evidence of God's common grace  
Every beat of our hearts  
Every breath of our lungs  
Every drop of rain  
Is a gracious gift of our Creator

Think about all the gifts that you enjoyed and took for granted before COVID  
Freedom to travel, work, restaurants, holidays, health, friends, family  
Each and everyone of these things were never our entitlement  
These were gifts of grace from God.

But God shows us His grace in an even more pointed way through His Son Jesus

This brings us to our second point

### **Truth and Grace come through Jesus**

Our community needs both truth and grace

When we read the gospel of John  
We see both truth and grace embodied in Jesus

### **Jesus is truth because of who He is**

The eternal word who created the world

John 1 verse 1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

In the book of Genesis before anything was in existence  
Before God said "Let there be light"  
Before He brought something out of nothing  
Jesus was there  
In fact Jesus was the Word bringing reality into existence  
Reality is defined by Jesus  
What is true in this world is defined by Jesus our Creator  
He made everything  
He made us  
But how did we respond to Him

John 1 Verse 9

<sup>9</sup>The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

Jesus didn't come into a thankful and receptive world  
But a world that rejected him  
A world in darkness hates being exposed by the light  
We don't like being exposed by the truth

Last year after the mishandling of hotel quarantining  
By the government and many weeks of lockdown  
There was clearly anger being directed at the government  
And a demand for accountability  
Which is why we had an inquiry and some lost their jobs  
Here's a sign that someone posted in their garden in my neighbourhood about our premier  
"Dan, you can't handle the truth"  
Accountability matters doesn't it  
Because truth matters

But we have an interesting relationship with the truth don't we?  
We always want others measure up against the truth  
But I think all of us struggle to have the same truth applied to ourselves  
We're ready to reject others when they fail to measure up  
But what if that same measure was applied to ourselves?  
How would we feel then?

That's why Jesus is also confronting  
Jesus is the light of truth

And the light that gives life to all  
Is also the light that exposes the darkness of our lives  
And we find that very unsettling

Why could Jesus say that He is the truth?  
The only way to God His Father  
Because Jesus is the Son of the Father

Verse 14

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

In one sentence

John makes a stunning statement  
The creator becomes a creature  
The one who made us becomes one of us  
In Jesus we see the glory of God  
We see something of God's magnificence  
Truth from God is not at arm's length  
Many have a view that God is distant and impersonal  
But God didn't send a nameless PR person to reveal Himself  
He sent His one and only Son  
God's truth is close and personal

In the Old Testament when God revealed His glory to Moses  
Moses was at risk of being consumed by God's glory  
So God shielded Moses from experiencing the fullness of His glory  
How could a sinner experience the glory of God and survive?  
But in John we are seeing even more of God's glory than Moses  
How is that possible?  
Because Jesus is both Truth and Grace

Verse 16

<sup>16</sup> Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given.

God's Old Testament law is truth  
And Truth only points out your guilt when you break the commands of the law  
God's law was not able to bring us into right relationship with God  
We need more than truth  
We also need grace

In Jesus we find this grace  
John makes a point of saying that God's grace  
His undeserved kindness is abundant  
Grace in place of grace already given  
God is not stingy towards undeserving sinners like us

We see this grace in the love that God shows to the world by sending Jesus

John 3:16

<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

God loves the world that hates Jesus  
If Jesus was just Truth – He would condemn the world  
But Jesus is also Grace so He loves the world that is guilty for hating Him.

In the ministry of Jesus we see both truth and grace  
Jesus was truth when he confronted the hypocrisy of the Pharisees  
Jesus preached the truth about hell, even more than he spoke about heaven  
Jesus didn't pull his punches when he told the rich ruler  
that he had to give away his wealth and follow him  
Jesus fulfilled the law by obeying its commands  
Jesus is all truth

Jesus is grace when he ate with tax collectors and sinners when others shunned them  
Jesus welcomed children and touched lepers who others had no time for  
Jesus gave dignity to women who were treated as inferior  
He welcomed the hardened criminal dying next to him into paradise  
Jesus is all grace

And the Truth and Grace of Jesus finds its ultimate expression in the cross  
The glory of God the Father and the Son in all its fulness.

This is what Jesus prayed about the hour of his death the night before he died.

John 17

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, <sup>2</sup> since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. <sup>3</sup> And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Why is the cross so glorious?  
Because we see the fulness of truth and the fulness of grace

God's commitment to the truth means He must punish our sin  
But God's commitment to grace means he loves sinners and wants to forgive our sin  
How can He do both?  
By punishing sin on Jesus on the cross  
So that He can show His grace in forgiving sinners  
Through the death of Jesus sin is cancelled and not the sinner  
God's just anger towards sin is satisfied by the death of Jesus

It's very hard to find both truth and grace in a relationship  
Usually we get one or the other  
Truth without grace  
Is like the a blow of a hammer  
We're being told something harsh  
And they say it's for own good  
But it feels like they're just getting it off their chest



And it feels like we're being pounded

But grace without truth  
Is soft and indulgent  
People tell you what you want to hear  
It sounds nice  
But what if what I'm doing is killing me  
Grace without truth is a kindness that slowly kills  
Like a diet of marshmallows

Jesus is not either or  
Jesus is both and  
He is truth AND grace  
Just what we need  
The message of the gospel of Jesus Christ tells us we are wrong but that we are loved.

This is how Tim Keller puts it:

"The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope."

Truth – we are more sinful and flawed than we ever dared believe  
Grace – we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope

I don't know how many relationships you have  
Where someone sees you at your very worst  
And gives you their very best  
And this is exactly what Jesus does  
This is the cross of Christ  
This is the good news of Christ

This is why every single one of us  
Needs the truth and grace of Jesus  
Have you ever experienced this truth and grace?  
If not, Jesus invites you to come to him.  
And not just once, but to keep coming back to this truth and grace?  
By keeping your eyes fixed on the cross of Christ.

If you are a follower of Jesus  
Well you need to show this truth and grace to others  
In fact, every time we share the gospel with others  
We are sharing a message of truth and grace  
You're a sinner – truth  
God welcomes sinners - grace  
In fact, God's people should be a community of both truth and grace  
I want you to write these two sentences down  
Two sentences that will help us rebuild as we come out of lockdown  
Two sentences that would revolutionise your relationship with God and with others.  
Are you ready, here they are

“I’m wrong, please forgive me”

“You’re wrong, and I love you”

### **I’m wrong please forgive me.**

This is a statement that recognises when you fail to live up to the truth

But it is also humble enough to receive grace

This is how every Christian begins and continues their relationship with Jesus

And it is also how we should relate to each other

Each month, when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper together

This is a meal that reminds us to keep saying to God and to each other

“I’m wrong please forgive me”

So often the thing we hear when someone does the wrong thing is this

“I’m not wrong”, “I’m not sorry” or

“I’m sorry that you feel that way”

These are proud, defensive statements

Designed to protect yourself.

This should not be the way for people who know Jesus

We surrender our pride

We recognise we are liars and hypocrites

We need to keep learning how to say: “I’m wrong, please forgive me”

I want you to think of a relationship

Where you need to say those words to the person

I’m wrong please forgive me

Truth and grace like this can transform that relationship

Ask God for the strength to go and say it to them.

### **You’re wrong and I love you**

This is a statement that recognises truth – you’re wrong

But it doesn’t give up on the person – that’s grace

So often, the message we hear in our cancel culture is this

“You’re wrong and I hate you”

Every time someone writes an anger filled comment online

Every time someone issues hateful expletives at a politician

Every time someone yells at other drivers on the road

Every time someone refuses to forgive someone who is sorry

This is proud and attacking

Or we hear this statement, “You’re right and I love you”

When deep down we actually know they’re wrong

This is a lie not the truth and it is not good for the person

The thing that Jesus did so well in his ministry to others

He could say “You’re wrong but I love you” all the time

This was what Jesus’ ministry was all about

He told people that they needed to repent

In other words, you’re sinful

You’re doing the wrong thing

You need forgiveness  
You need to change  
But at the same time, he would do that with tears of love in his eyes  
He would do that filled with compassion for people who hated him  
He would do that with the eagerness to forgive and welcome people to him  
And he was willing to pay the cost of this forgiveness on the cross

Such grace and truth should also be the way for people of the cross  
For we know the comfort of our Saviour Jesus  
Who said to us "You're wrong and I love you"  
This is truth and grace  
So learn how to say "You're wrong and I love you"

Think of someone you know who is sinning against God  
And ask God for the strength to say to them with gentleness and love  
You're wrong and I love you

Think of someone you disagree with on Facebook  
Before you write anything on their post  
Say out loud "You're wrong and I love you"  
Then ask God for wisdom and love to respond

Vaccines, Lockdowns, The role of government, the relation of the church to the state  
These are important issues that are currently being spoken about  
Issues where we can show our love for our neighbour or not  
Issues that can divide brothers and sisters in the church  
These are important conversations that we should be having with one another in the church  
And with those in the wider community.

But here's a way forward in those conversations  
Regardless of what position you hold on these issues  
The next time you go into one of these conversations  
Remember truth and grace  
Be prepared to use these two statements in your conversation  
"I'm wrong, please forgive me"  
"You're wrong, but I love you"

Truth and Grace matter in community  
Truth and Grace come through Jesus  
We need the truth and grace of Jesus  
And we need to show the truth and grace of Jesus

Let's pray