

Christmas Sermon 2016 – John 1:1-18 Bruce Stanley

Merry Christmas!

It's a unique phrase isn't it?

You don't say Merry Birthday, or Merry Easter, Merry Anniversary, Merry New Year.

Merry Christmas is just for Christmas.

Except in Sydney.

- **Very Merry**

In Sydney, they put up these banners everywhere that said "Very Merry", leaving off the word "Christmas". A lot of people were angry. Finance Minister Dominic Perrottet arranged for them to be taken down. He said: "When you leave out the one word that matters all you're left with is a vacuous, bland platitude."

I love that he said that and I love that he DID that. But I still find it a little amusing when I hear about things like this. I know people who don't like celebrating their birthday because they don't like to remember how old they are. Imagine sending them a card that just said "Very happy!"

Or a thank you card that said: "With Sincere"

Or a sympathy card that said: "My deepest"

But we get used to hearing phrases at Christmas like "Seasons greetings", "Happy holidays", Or one of my favourites on a Christmas card: "Happy Everything – now leave me alone until next year"

But these things are important. Because words are important. Words are powerful. Words can offend. Words can encourage. Words MEAN something.

Because our word is our pledge. Our word is our commitment.

- **I pledge you my word**

In one of our wedding ceremonies, the bride and groom make their commitment to each other and then they say: "And to this, I pledge you my word". Giving your word, pledging your word, is a commitment.

But that commitment is only as good as the person who is saying it. If I say to you "I will see you tomorrow", and then I don't see you tomorrow, that says something about my commitment to you. It says something about my character. Either I'm not reliable, or I'm forgetful, or I don't care about what I say. I'm sure there are people in your life whose words you trust. And others you don't!

In John chapter 1, God gives us his Word.

- ***1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was with God in the beginning.***

It tells us a few things in that verse.

1. God's Word is there at the very **beginning**.
2. God's Word is **with** Him
3. God's Word **is** Him.

God's Word is a person. God's commitment to us is a person. God's pledge to us is a person. And who is that person? Who is that **Word** of God?

The next verses tell us a few more things about that person:

- Verse 3: **through him all things were made** – so this person is the creator.
- Verse 4: **in him was life, and that life was the light of men** – this person offers life and light.
- Verse 10: this word, this person, came into this world, but **the world did not recognize him**.

But then in verse 14 we hear the final description of God's Word:

- **14The 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.**

The Word of God is Jesus. His son.

The pledge of God, the commitment of God, is Jesus, God himself, who became flesh and lived among us on earth.

Jesus was **with** God, and **is** God from the very beginning.

- **Grace and Truth**

And Jesus, God's word, brings **grace** and **truth**. And these are the words I think we really need to focus on today. God's word, God's pledge, Jesus, brings grace and truth to earth.

Letter to Santa...

I love reading kid's letters to Santa, because they're so honest. Like this one ...

"Dear Santa, how are you and the reindeer doing? I am doing fine. I want a football game and a football because my little brother always tries to steal mine. He may look sweet but he is the DEVIL! I also want a remote control truck.

Love Evan.

PS – how do you get into my house on Christmas?

Kids write letters to Santa because they want him to bring them things. But there are always those questions: how does Santa get into my house? How does he find me if I

move house? How does he deliver presents to millions of children on one night? These are the questions that we will probably never be able to answer...!

Why not ask those questions about God? How does **he** know us? How does **he** find us? What will **he** bring us? And how does **he** get into our life? John 1 answers all of these questions.

God knows us because he came to earth to know us.

God finds us because he is the creator.

And what does he bring us? Grace and truth.

Why grace and truth? Because these define God. God **IS** grace and truth.

Have a look at that truth in verse 9:

- ***9The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.***

Light brings truth. Light is a good thing. A great thing. Light pierces darkness. Light puts an end to darkness.

Have you ever been afraid of the dark? Or know someone who is? I think it's a helpful thing sometimes. I think it makes sense sometimes to be afraid of the dark. Because the darkness hides the truth. The darkness hides what is really there.

A lot of parents say this to their kids when they're afraid of the dark: "Look, there's nothing there in the dark that isn't there when the lights are on. Nothings changed!" To which I reply: "Then turn the light on and show me ONE MORE TIME that there isn't a clown under the bed with a large knife!"

The light reveals everything that was hidden in the darkness. People are afraid of the dark because there's a fear of things that are hidden or unknown.

- **III - bottle collector**

I heard the story of a guy who collected antique bottles. A serious bottle collector. Anyone here collect bottles? This guy uncovered an old bottle from the 1920s. It was beautiful. A very unique design in beautiful condition. He found it at an old building site late one afternoon. It was covered with dirt. But it was beautiful. He took it home and started washing the dirt off. Very carefully. And with all the dirt gone, it looked amazing. But then he put it under the light, and he noticed a small, tiny crack at the neck of the bottle. A tiny crack. He gave it to his wife and said: "Smash it for me. Just smash it."

To a collector, it's no good if it's not perfect. What he thought was valuable was actually worthless once it was clearly revealed in the light.

What happened when God came into the world in the person of Jesus, is that he brought light into darkness. He brought a light that showed up all the cracks and flaws of the world. He showed how dark it really is. He showed the depth of the darkness we live

in. He showed us the truth of our situation. But he also showed us grace. He showed us the truth of our dark circumstances, but he showed us grace as well.

It's a bit like this: Imagine someone comes into your bedroom late at night, turns on the light and shows you that there's a huge scary poisonous spider right over your bed. That's a revelation of truth. But then they say: "Let me get that for you" - and they reach over and they take that spider away. That's grace. Undeserved kindness. It's one thing to reveal truth. It's another to also show grace.

- **What Jesus does for us**

This is what Jesus has done for us at Christmas. He's turned on the light for us and said: "Look at the darkness you're living in. Let me fix that for you. Look at the cracks in your life. You've got some major issues. Look at the hopelessness of this world. Look at the sinfulness of this world. Look at the hate in this world. Look at the despair and the injustice and the pain and suffering and the tears and the death... let me fix that for you. But he doesn't fix it by making it all go away. He fixes it by giving us hope for the future. An eternal hope.

Let me finish with verse 12 –

- ***12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.***

Jesus came to light up the darkness. He came with truth. But he also came with grace. And he did all that so we could become children of God. Children of hope. Children of light. Children of heaven. Children with a future. He came to offer us an eternity with him.

Have a very merry... Christmas.

And may your Christmas be filled with light. May you know truth AND grace. And may you know what it means to be a child of the God of light, forever.

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 all mankind. 5The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

6There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

9The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 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 did receive 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.

14The 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.

15(John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") 16Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. 17For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.