

Christmas Eve 2024; Midnight Holy Communion,  
Ampleforth

Some words from tonight's Gospel, *“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.”*

In the last few weeks in Advent, I have spoken about, peace, joy, blessing and now on this Christmas Eve I am going to speak about 'grace'. We tend to talk about grace in church quite a lot. We expect to hear about it on occasions like this. It sounds good but, what does it mean? What is grace and what does it look like?

Here are a few examples of what grace looks like in the life of Jesus. When a woman, caught in adultery, was brought to Jesus by a baying mob full of self-righteous hatred, everyone saw the woman as an evil, wanton, shameful woman who deserved the punishment of death. When Jesus saw the same woman, he saw a sad, troubled, and damaged person, made in the image of God, who needed forgiveness and another chance at life. That is what grace looks like. When people saw Zacchaeus, a tax collector, they saw a greedy, intimidating, bullying crook. When Jesus saw Zacchaeus, he saw a small man who was rich by his ill-gotten gains but lonely and isolated, so he invited himself to dinner with Zacchaeus and the tax collector changed completely. That is what grace looks like. When Jesus was being crucified people saw the soldiers hammering the nails as evil, fearsome, unthinking brutes, servants of the Roman occupying force. When Jesus saw those soldiers he saw men, brutalised by violence, blindly following orders who deserved forgiveness and encouragement to live in a new way. That is what grace looks like

‘Full of grace and truth’. In the life of Jesus grace is expressed and revealed in his generosity of spirit, his willingness and desire to take a moment to look carefully at people and situations. Jesus did not order his world as we do, by labelling people as being either good or bad, or by counting people as either in or out of my tribe, my team, my social class, my religion, church, or denomination, my political party, my community. Jesus ordered his world by loving everyone because he was full of grace and truth, which enabled him to see the glimmer of goodness, or even the glimmer of the possibility of goodness, in all people, the spark of God’s image waiting to be lit. Grace is taking time to look for that glimmer of goodness in everyone and it leads to love which is shown as a generosity of spirit which is not swept along by the tide of public opinion or convention or personal agendas or the need to control, bully, and manipulate for personal gain or recognition.

The world needs grace. When we sit down for our Christmas dinner tomorrow, whether we ‘say grace’ or not before we eat, let us try and ensure that our conversations and the way we are with each other, especially those we find it difficult to love, are full of grace, generosity of spirit and when Christmas is over and life returns to normal let us make sure that there is more grace in our lives, in our dealings with others at home, at school, at work, in our church and in our community. If Jesus can be so full of grace that he could forgive those hammering nails into his hands and feet, surely, we can fill our lives with grace and to deal kindly, politely, respectfully, and creatively with everyone with whom we share our lives and who we encounter?

The world needs grace and we are called to deliver. If we are fortunate to receive gifts to unwrap tomorrow let us

spare a lot for the greatest gift, that of grace that was revealed to us in a baby born this night, and be thankful.

‘And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.’

Thanks be to God. Amen.