

The Gift of Grace

25 December 2022

Christmas Eve midnight and Christmas Day 2022

Preacher: Ven. Nick Mountfort - Vicar

Reading: John 1:1-14

*God of grace,
On this day
You give us the gift of Jesus.
Help us to receive all you have to give.
In Jesus' name we ask it...*

I wonder what gifts you have been given this Christmas. I wonder how much trouble you went to choose just the right gifts for others. The gifts people give say a lot about the giver. I heard of a mean father who gave his children batteries for Christmas with a note saying, 'Toys Not Included'.

Tonight/today we gather to celebrate the greatest gift of all. The first gift that kicked off this whole gift giving thing, the gift of Jesus.

We have listened to one of the most majestic readings in all the Bible - the opening passage of John's Gospel. It's all there: the pre-existent Christ and the wonderful image of the light forever shining in the darkness and the darkness never overcoming it. You could spend a lifetime just studying this passage, and many have.

Tonight, in the 90 minutes I have for the sermon, I want to focus our thoughts on just one thing: the gift of grace.

John 1:14 says "And the word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth." Verse 16 adds, "From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace."

But what is grace? Grace is the unmerited gift, given to us, not because we deserve it but because God wants the very best for us.

What does grace look like in our everyday lives?

Looking back Jane wondered what she was thinking but standing at the gate one day she invited Stan to Christmas dinner. Stan had lived next door to the family for years and they all hated him. He seemed grumpy and if ever a ball or a kite went over the fence, they never saw it again. The rest of the family didn't greet the news with much joy. "You did what!?" they said, "You invited Stan-the-old-grump from next door. That will kill the Christmas spirit. Well done mum!" The day came. It started really awkwardly but as time went on, the family began to relax. Stan, as it turned out, was just basically lonely. He had lost his wife many years earlier. One of the young kids got talking to him and he told them

stories about growing up on the Coast. It wasn't long until Stan reciprocated with an invitation of his own. He started being very neighbourly, taking in the wheelie bins, feeding the cat, watering the tomatoes. What started as a mistake turned into a lasting friendship.

There wasn't a family do that old Stan wasn't invited to. Within a couple of years he had become part of the family. But what came next shocked everyone. Stan died. That was no surprise. He was old.

But the big surprise was the phone call from the lawyer. "Stan," she said, "has left you everything." As it turned out, he not only owned his house but had a tidy share portfolio too.

This is what grace looks like: something unmerited, more than a little overwhelming and life enriching.

For many, 2022 has been a difficult year. But even in the worst of times, God's grace is present.

Andriy and Yana, a young Ukrainian couple, were surprised by grace in a queue for groceries. The young couple had gone hunting for food in their home city of Mariupol during a lull in the Russian bombardment. Caught in the queue with 200 others, the missiles began to fall again. It was then that they, never having asked God for anything before, began praying for their children who had stayed at home. "That was the moment," said Yana "that pushed us into faith." Describing how his new faith had grown in the months that followed Andriy, an electrician, said "We felt God was guiding us again and again. When we needed to take shelter, God guided us to a church facility. It looked like God was with us in the bombing and led us straight to a great community in the local church."

But there have also been moments of God's grace for us at St Peter's. One standout for us is the Victory Church asking to join us. They will continue to worship on a Sunday afternoon, but over time we will find ways to work more and more closely together. Enriching the witness to the community for both churches.

Philip Yancey, who wrote a book entitled *What's So Amazing About Grace?* concluded "*God loves people because of who God is, not because of who we are.*"

In the end what have we done to deserve the gifts of God, what have we done to even deserve the gift of life? All we can do is, with gratitude, acknowledge the gift of God's grace in our lives.

Any gift teaches us much about the giver. At Christmas we learn about the ultimate gift giver – God. God is not a \$2 Shop shopper. God gives us at Christmas that which is most precious – his very own Son. He wants us to have lives filled with grace upon grace. This is the message of Christmas. All we have to do is open the present.