

Behold! Full of Grace and Truth

John 1:1-4, 10-14

Introduction

All throughout this Advent Season, and now continuing on into the Christmas season, we have re-telling the birth story of Jesus. And along the way, we have also been on an intentional search for a single word included in those stories. That word is:

BEHOLD!

We have been defining this hard-to-define word like this:

Stop what you are doing! Pay attention! Something important is happening right now. You don't want to miss it.

We have searched for that word in these stories because we know that it will always point us to an incredibly important truth – a truth that has always been in the story all along, but a truth that we may have easily overlooked up to this moment. Such things happen when you know a story well. You often read right past some key details because your brain keeps telling you “Move on! I know this part.”

Our search for this word brings us to the Gospel of John tonight. John is one of four books in the New Testament that are known as a “Gospel,” so named because they focus on the story of Jesus. These four books are named after their authors.

- Two of these Gospels, Matthew and Luke, go into great detail as they tell us the story of the birth of Jesus. It is in those books we learn about shepherds and angels, wise men and stables. (A little later in this service we will read the birth story from the Gospel of Luke.
- The Gospel of Mark doesn't mention anything about the birth of Jesus. It's the shortest book, and it only focuses on the three-year ministry of Jesus.
- The Gospel of John, our text for tonight, gives us only the verses I just read for you. And those are a bit cryptic, aren't they?

All we hear in this text about the birth of Jesus is this simple phrase:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us ... (John 1:14)

After establishing that Jesus was the Word of God present from before the beginning of time, John simply says Jesus took on human flesh and lived His life among the rest of humanity. Just as certainly as you and I are living in the flesh right now, so Jesus lived.

And then ... just before describing the ministry of Jesus ... John uses that word. The word we've been looking for. Behold! But you may not see it. In fact, if you use the word search function on your computer, you won't find it. That's because John uses the past tense of the word. Not “behold.” But “beheld.” Did you hear it? Listen again:

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we **beheld** His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)*

From a literary perspective, this is the thesis statement of the Gospel. John wrote his book because of this truth. John is excited because he knows that the powerful, creative, dynamic word that was instrumental in the creation of the universe made the ultimate, loving decision to set aside all the majesty and wonder of heaven to encapsulate Himself inside a human body. And not only that, this “Word-made-flesh” will allow the religious and political leaders of the day murder Him on a cross so that everyone of us might experience the total forgiveness of our sins.

You should hear the crescendo building through these first 14 verses until John bursts forth with “WE BEHELD HIS GLORY.” We got to see it! Firsthand! I was there!

- I saw the miracles
- I heard the parables
- I witnessed the crucifixion

Along with the other disciples, “we beheld His glory.” We saw more than a carpenter's son. As we looked at Jesus, we saw the glory of God.

That glory showed itself in two ways:

#1: JESUS EMBODIED THE TRUTH OF GOD

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and **truth**. (John 1:14)*

He was full of truth. In fact, near the end of His ministry, Jesus would identify Himself as truth with these words:

*I am the way, the **truth** and the life ... (John 14:6)*

One of John's 11 colleagues – we call them “disciples” – was a man named Peter. Peter wanted you to think he was the smartest and bravest man in the room. As a result, he was always putting his foot in his mouth. Time and again Peter would blurt out some statement that sounded good (to him), only to have Jesus correct him. And do it in front of other people.

A classic example happens on the last night of Jesus' life. Jesus and His disciples had just finished their evening meal – the Last Supper – when Jesus makes it clear that He is about to be arrested and killed. That's when Peter opens his mouth:

Then Peter spoke up and said, “Even if all the rest lose their faith and fall away, I will still be beside you, Jesus!” (Matthew 26:33)

Big brave Peter! But Jesus is full of truth. He knows Peter, and He calls on Peter to face the truth about himself:

"Are you sure, Peter?" Jesus said. "The truth is, before the rooster crows a few hours from now, you will have denied me three times." (Matthew 26:34)

And of course, that is exactly what happened.

One of the unescapable realities of being around Jesus is that we have to face the truth about ourselves. We might be able to fool those around us, and maybe even fool ourselves. But there will always be those uncomfortable moments when Jesus says "are you sure?"

In the words of that famous singing theologian, Elvis Presley:

Truth is like the sun. You can shut it out for a time, but it ain't goin' away. (Elvis Presley)

Fortunately for Peter and for us ...

#2: JESUS EMBODIED THE GRACE OF GOD

Do you remember John's thesis statement?

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of **grace** and truth. (John 1:14)*

Peter was humiliated and broken when he came face-to-face with the truth about who he really was. Most of us are. And if we are not, we should be. We should be like King David.

He was crushed when he was forced by the prophet Nathan to come out in the open about the biggest sin in his life. He was so broken that those around him thought he was going to die. You can read about that in the book of 2 Samuel.

But for both Peter and David, God's grace was applied and their lives were transformed. That's the same grace that is available to each of us. Every person will stand before God and face the truth about their lives.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

But that is Jesus came. He came to bring God's grace to each person. That's the good news the angels proclaimed to the shepherds on that hillside many years ago:

I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. (Luke 2:10)

This grace is for all people.

Grace is this amazing gift that God gives to those who bring their brokenness and sin to Him. Instead of leaving such people to wallow in their misery and shame, God lifts them up and showers them with His love and blessing. There may be consequences that have to be dealt with but grace is poured out nonetheless. God's grace is the only remedy when we realize the truth about ourselves.

There is a story about a man who died and found himself outside the gates of heaven. He knocked on the door, and St. Peter opened the door. As the man was about to step through the door, Peter got in his way and refused to admit him.

Peter then said to him, "Before I can let you in, you need to list all the reasons you deserve to be here. I will tell you the score for each reason, and if you reach 100 points, you can enter. Otherwise you have to leave.

The man began to list his reasons:

- I went to church every Sunday for more than 50 years. Peter responded: "2 points." "Two points for 50 years. That doesn't sound fair."
- I gave my offerings and tithes every week. "3 points"
- I sang in the choir. "1 point." The man started to panic, and then he remembered:
- I told two of my friends about Jesus. "Good for you. 5 points," Peter answered.

Now the man was really in a panic. He was out of reasons and had only accumulated 10 points. In a bit of frustration, he turns to Peter and says, "At this rate, I am only going to get in by the grace of God."

Peter smiled. "100 points. Welcome to heaven."

It is precisely because of that grace that each of us the opportunity to go to heaven. Nothing about us merits it on our own. We can't earn enough points with God to get there based on our own efforts. That strategy has to go away.

That's what another writer of Scripture meant when he wrote these words:

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

APPLICATION

That is why John was so excited when he wrote these words. God has intervened in our great dilemma, and I got to see it!!! We BEHELD it!

I've never seen Jesus. Truthfully, I'd be more than a little bit suspicious if you said you had seen him. But I have seen the results of His work.

- I've seen lives that have been changed from brokenness to wholeness.
- I've seen incredible answers to prayer.
- I've watched as God uses people beyond their comfort levels and skill sets to make a difference in the life of someone else.

- I've been there when a person has confessed their need for a Savior and prayed a sinner's prayer.

I have not seen Jesus in the flesh. But I have indeed "BEHELD" Him.

- I beheld Jesus on the night of April 6, 1966 when I asked Him to be my Savior.
- I beheld Him as I struggled through the untimely death of my mother.
- I beheld Him as I wrestled through the pain of parenting.
- I beheld Him each time I have been unfairly rejected and accused.

This same Jesus continues to make himself seen by Christians each and every day. And that is good news!

Amen.