

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Sunday after New Year's Day, January 4, 2015

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 239, 102:4, 294, 70, 242.

Lessons: Isaiah 61:10-62:3, Ephesians 3:1-18, John 1:19-34.

Sermon Text: John 1:14-18

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltritt

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The evangelist John has just told us the eternal history of Jesus Christ, also called *"the Word"*. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* (John 1:1 NIV)

He concluded that summary of history with *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."* John speaks as an eyewitness, for he had known Jesus firsthand. *"We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."*

John the evangelist quotes John the Baptist. John the evangelist may even have once been a disciple of John the Baptist, and so his quotation from John certainly carries a lot of weight, in addition to the fact that it is God's verbally inspired Word.

Then John goes to the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ: Grace and truth.

"GRACE AND TRUTH CAME THROUGH JESUS CHRIST"

- 1. The Law came through Moses.**
- 2. Jesus Christ fulfilled the Law to complete the Gospel.**

The word of God in front of us today gives us, among other things, a contrast between Law and Gospel, or as John puts it, between Law and *"grace and truth"*.

How is it that mankind knows law? How is it that mankind knows the Law of God? *"For the law was given through Moses."* John points to the complete revelation of God's Law, the Law given through Moses directly from God on Mount Sinai.

The Law was first written into the hearts of men, at creation, as Paul writes in Romans that Gentiles *"show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them."* (Romans 2:14-15)

Because of the sinfulness of mankind it was necessary to provide God's Law a second time. That second time is what has been called the Law of Moses. But it is really the Law from God through Moses. On Mount Sinai God gave the Law through Moses to his chosen people, the Israelites. This was written on two tablets of stone. Even the figure of speech "written in stone" means something that is very important, inflexible, unchangeable. But, alas, man has changed, twisted, perverted, as well as totally broken and smashed God's Laws.

But when a law, a rule is written down there should be no mistaking what it really means.

When we look at all the Laws given through Moses, we find about 24 chapters in Leviticus, and about 26 chapters in Deuteronomy.

We recognize three aspects of the Law, or three kinds of Law that were given through Moses. First and most important is the moral Law, that is, Law for all mankind for all time which is best summarized in the 10 Commandments. Luther chose the 10 Commandments as the heart of what should be taught in his small catechism, "as the head of the family should teach it in the simplest way to those in his household".

In the Law given on Mount Sinai, we also find civil law, all the civil laws that God's chosen people needed as a nation.

And also for God's chosen people in the Old Testament, we have ceremonial Laws given by God, that is, all the Laws that were to guide their worship ceremonies. These included things such as sacrifices and the duties of the priests, which pointed forward to the sacrifice that Jesus Christ, our great high priest, would make for us and for all mankind.

So Law, God's Law, came through Moses. And God is very specific and clear. For example, when God says "you shall not murder", that's exactly what God means. When God says "you shall not commit adultery," that is demanding precisely the sexual purity God commands. When God says "you shall not steal," that's exactly what God means. When God says "you shall not covet", he is striking at all the sins of the heart that want things that God does not want us to have. All his commandments are clear.

Then we think about the laws of man. How do man's laws come about? Well, in the United States of America, we have a history that all the laws that govern people in our country and states and communities were enacted, written down, created by our lawmakers. And in our nation, that has been lawmakers elected by the people. Before our nation existed, laws were basically the decrees of the King. The King and others of the nobility decreed laws that must be obeyed by the people. And where did the King and the other leaders get their ideas of right and wrong, of law? In what we call Western society, the Bible, that is, the Old Testament and the New Testament has been a primary source of what is right and wrong and of civil laws. And even in our country, up until approximately the last thirty years of the twentieth century, civil laws were generally based on God's Laws in the Bible. Of course, that has changed drastically in the last 45 or so years. When the United States Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1972 in its Roe versus Wade decision, God's fifth commandment went out the window as a foundation of American civil law. Abortion is murder, murder of an unborn child. And in the past two years states and the United States Supreme Court have thrown out God's sixth commandment by approving homosexual marriage. So it would really be impossible for anyone to think of the United States as a "Christian" nation.

So you have seen that man's laws change according to the whims of those making the laws, and really do not always follow God's Laws. When it comes to what man says and decrees as law, we realize that man's laws aren't always consistent with God's Laws. They sometimes only give man what he wants, not what God wants from mankind.

The Word of God in front of us today tells us that Jesus Christ was ***"full of grace and truth."***

When we hear the word grace, we think about God's undeserved love and mercy. What comes to mind are passages such as these: ***"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*** (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Out of the fullness of Jesus we all, all believers, have received grace on top of grace. The fountain of mercy never dries up. Fresh grace and mercy appears over and above that already received. Because sin abounds and continually brings on transgressions, grace and mercy must abound still more. Though we use up grace daily, there is always a new and rich supply on hand from the inexhaustible store of God. The river of grace flowing from the Savior is always full.

Under the Old Covenant, the opposite of grace, that is, merit and works, was prominent. The Law as given by Moses demanded full obedience and threatened the transgressor with temporal and eternal punishment. But Moses, who was a preacher of the Law by God's command, was a mere man, and therefore the Law itself could not have lasting value in the way in which it had been in use among the Jews. The Law of God, that is, the Law of Moses, shows mankind its sinfulness and inability to keep God's Law as he demands, that is, perfectly.

But Christ is the God-man, the Word of God Incarnate. He brings grace and truth. Grace is complete assurance of free pardon and truth. The Word of the Gospel which proclaims grace and mercy is the sum and substance of the truth and faithfulness of God. Grace came through Jesus Christ, who came down from heaven in his own person, not only to preach the Gospel, but to obey all God's Law perfectly and make the proclamation of the completed Gospel possible.

Jesus Christ was full not only of love that we don't deserve, but he was also full of truth. Throughout John's Gospel we find contrast between truth and falsehood, truth and lies.

Truth comes from Jesus Christ. Lies come from Satan, the father of lies. Falsehood comes from Satan. Later in this Gospel, John tells us this about Satan: **"He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."** (John 8:44)

Truth is the key word, and, in fact, Jesus himself tells us **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** (John 14:6)

Jesus became man and made his dwelling among us. Jesus came to reveal God to us, to make known the final mysteries of the Gospel to mankind. He can do this because **"No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known."**

In the way that the glory of the Lord filled the Old Testament tabernacle and later the temple, Jesus came to reveal God's glory in a way humans could look at and not be blinded.

Jesus came to bring blessings beyond measure. **"From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another."** The fullness of Jesus was the fullness of God dwelling in him, a fullness with which he also blesses us, **"attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."**

God's Word assures us **"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority."** (Colossians 2:9-10)

As hard as it is to measure or describe that grace, John's words here can help us appreciate it more.

God's unfathomable love, which he gives us in spite of our unworthiness, never ends. We use some, and more takes its place for us to use. It is there to comfort us when we hurt. It forgives us when we sin. It relieves us when we feel guilty. It supports us when we're afraid. It gives everything to us who can give nothing to earn it or to repay it. God's love is so great that the eternal Word Jesus Christ became flesh and sacrificed himself on the cross for us. Jesus gives us more grace in place of grace. We always have his love. We cannot exhaust the supply.

The coming of Jesus Christ fulfilled everything commanded by and promised by God for the salvation of mankind. The Jews of Jesus' day looked to Moses to learn from God. Now, however, John the Baptist testifies, we have something better, **"for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."** Moses gave the moral Law that reveals God's will and our sin. He gave ceremonial Laws that foreshadowed the redemptive work of Christ. He presented prophecies that promised a Savior to come.

Now the Savior has come. In his grace he has fulfilled God's moral Law perfectly in our place. He has offered the one sacrifice needed for all time, for all sin. He has turned the promises given through Moses to living reality and established God's truth forever.

Jesus has come to reveal God to us and to make us God's children. **"No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known."** As Jesus himself said, **"No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him"** (Matthew 11:27). The Word came to make the Father known. The Word, who is with God and is God, reveals the Father to us.

What a blessing – an unending blessing – that we now are God's children, by grace. May God's free grace always be ours! Amen.