

And the Word was made 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.

'Full of grace and truth'! Isn't that precisely what we all feel is missing in life today - grace and truth? Life is becoming coarser and coarser, and no-one tells the truth any more. In fact, if you want to make a mint of money and become famous, be foul-mouthed like Jonathan Ross. If you want to get on in life, you're wasting your time being gentle and considerate. Be aggressive. Make a nuisance of yourself. Be loud. Our media will actually *celebrate* you, the viler and cruder you are. TV these days is all about *Big Brother*, and *I'm a Celebrity, Get me out of here*. Go on, make a complete prat of yourself as you tell the whole world about your most intimate illnesses on *Embarrassing Bodies*. Go on *Come, Dine With Me*, and fall out with your partners. That's exactly what the programme producers want. Swearing is now normal.

Don't we just long for a bit of grace? There was a time when people said, 'Please may I have a glass of water?' Now it's the grunt of 'I need water'. Who bothers to write thank-you letters now? I could go on, but are we really any happier with this modern cult of coarseness and low-level aggression?

Who can forget the quiet dignity and composure of the widow of Staff-Sgt Olaf Schmid of the RLC, killed instantly on 31 October while dismantling a road-side bomb in Afghanistan? I shall never forget her appearance on Newsnight. Christina sat with her back straight, her hands together, and her head high. She never hesitated in her speech, never took the

opportunity to have a cheap pop at the Government, and never sank into self-pity. She most certainly had grace.

Many of us don't realise it, but what our society is crying out for is grace. Deep down, we want a return to dignity. And dignity comes from self-respect. The other thing that our society is crying out for is *truth*. We want people to tell the truth. We all accept that we need politicians. We need leaders. We just want them to be *better* leaders. We don't want them telling us a load of lies, and then burrowing their noses in the trough, and even *then* lying about it! We are sick of *spin*, very largely because it insults our intelligence.

Thousands and thousands of people in Iraq have died and had their country turned into turmoil because of a war based on lies. We get these promises about 'tough on crime, and tough on the causes of crime', and what we see is criminals let off and protected by human rights legislation. And what is truly depressing, is that, with a few noble exceptions on all sides, they're all the same, promising anything to get into power.

Mind you, don't think this is a modern phenomenon. Does the name Earl Long mean anything to you? He and his brother Huey were the most corrupt of the corrupt politicians in deepest Louisiana. Earl Long was called 'Uncle Long' because of his many relatives whom he helped into jobs. He famously had an affair with the stripper, Blaze Starr, and was finally admitted to a mental hospital. One day the Attorney-General, Jack Gremillion rushed into Governor Long's office to tell him that there was a huge crowd outside in a nasty mood. During

the election campaign the Governor had promised the people from Pearl River a new road. So where was it?

'Hell, I don't have time for them. Send them away,' said Long Gremillion pleaded, 'But, Governor, what can I tell them?' 'Tell them I lied!'

Magnificent isn't it? At least he was honest about lying to his voters. And they elected him Governor *three* times!

Let's get rid of the spin. What is banking based on? Bits of paper called pound notes? Funny bars of shiny yellow metal? The whole financial system is based on one thing - trust. As the City's motto used to be, 'My word is my bond'. Get rid of trust, and the whole banking world gets the jitters, and panics. We are living with that today.

This is crucial. When people don't tell the truth, we can't trust each other. Nowhere is it more vital to trust each other than in the Army on ops. One of the 6 Core Values of the British Army is Integrity. If you we don't have Integrity; if we're not honest, we can't trust each other. In battle, relying on each other is life and death. The motto of the Army Foundation College is TRUST, COURAGE TEAM SPIRIT.

We need to trust each other in our marriages. One of the reasons we now have all these wretched targets at work is that we can't trust people to do their best.

*Psalms* 51.6 says: 'Thou [Lord] desirest truth in the inward parts'. 'Truth in the inward parts'; we call that 'integrity' today. And we are crying out for it. One of my favourite psalms is *Ps* 15, sometimes called the 'Gentleman's Psalm. May we turn to p549 to read it again...?

In my daily Bible reading I've been reading the prophet Hosea. It was astonishing how relevant it all was. So 4.1:

*There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery.*

Everything is relative today, we are told. There is no absolute truth, no absolute, unchanging moral standards. It's just what seems good to you. Even the clergy seem embarrassed by the Bible as God's unchanging truth. Jesus isn't really *the* truth, and he certainly isn't *the* Way, only a way among many.

At Hosea 8.12 God complained that his Word had become 'something strange' in a world of cultural relativism:

*I wrote for them the many things of my law, but they regarded them as something strange.*

And here at 10.4 is a word from God for our leaders:

*They make many promises, take false oaths and make agreements. Therefore lawsuits spring up like poisonous weeds ...*

As we end the year, let's pray for an end to the coarseness, and focus on whatsoever things are pure, lovely and of good report. Let's pray that the powers-that-be begin to see that *the* issue is the problem of truth. And we Christians, let's get back to Jesus, not just as teacher and good man from the past; not just as optional life-style choice is you happen to like that sort of thing, but as God's very Word which became flesh in Jesus and who dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. If we are ever going to win people for Christ, let's stand up for him, name him more, and claim him as *the* Way, and *the* Truth. The world may not *want* Jesus, but it badly needs him. We desperately need more grace and truth in our society, and only Christ is full of grace and truth.