

Grace Embodied (John 1.14-18) Discussion Guide and Questions

Baptist Hui Main Session #1 and Workshop, Dunedin, 3 November 2016.

Andrew Picard, Lecturer in Systematic & Practical Theology, andrew.picard@carey.ac.nz

A portion of Session #1 looked at Grace Embodied, see the video online
www.lifelonglearning.nz/grace-celebrated (38 minutes)

At the heart of the Christian faith is astonishment, amazement and worship at the gracious generosity of God who has taken up our cause in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, God humbles himself and goes on a journey into the far country, into the strange land of human sinfulness and disobedience, to take our predicament to himself. In the far country, God gives himself to humanity and embraces our lost condition. Whilst God gives himself to us, he does not give himself away. God embraces the strange land of human disobedience, but he never becomes a stranger to himself. God is not overwhelmed by our sinfulness because he is the Lord. Instead our sinfulness is overwhelmed by his mercy and grace as he does for us that which we could not do for ourselves – to live obediently in response to God’s love. Through the Spirit’s power, the Son offers obedient human life in response to the Father on our behalf. In Christ and by the Spirit’s power, God draws humanity back to himself by means of himself. In doing so, God reveals himself to be the God who is for us, even in our rebellion from him. In his freedom, God has chosen not to be God without us. Instead, God has freely determined to be God for us.

John’s account of the incarnation is that it is an act of redemption, however, it is not merely a rescue project to fix the mess that humans have made of things. After all, sin does not condition grace, grace conditions sin. John also portrays the incarnation as an act of creation. John’s use of “In the beginning...” (1:1) is clearly an echo of the Genesis account of creation and John reminds us that God is committed to his creation because he created it through the Word who is Jesus Christ. In the incarnation of Jesus Christ we find the Lord of creation who has returned to claim his own and liberate the creation to become what God intended it to be in Jesus Christ. Not only is the incarnation an act of salvation and creation, it is also an act of covenant faithfulness. John’s use of “grace and truth” (1:14) is an echo of God’s self-description that he gave to Moses at Mt Sinai: “The LORD, the LORD, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Ex. 34:6). Likewise the promise of the Word becoming flesh and dwelling amongst us (literally ‘tabernacling’ amongst us) echoes the promised presence of God in the tabernacle (Ex. 33). The incarnation is not merely a rescue project in which God gives grace to recalcitrant sinners, it is more broadly the faithful action of the gracious and merciful God who is, and has always been, committed to his creation and its creatures. The incarnation is an act of our gracious God who is “for us” even in, and

especially in, our rejection of him. This “for us-ness” is the grace of God and the God of grace who we celebrate, and its radical mercy calls forth in us astonishment, amazement and worship.

Questions for Small Group Discussion:

1. Do you believe that God, in his inner most being, is ‘for us’? Discuss why or why not.
2. What difference does it make that sin does not condition grace, but grace conditions sin?
3. What difference does it make for you to see the incarnation not only as an act of salvation, but also an act of creation and covenant? I.e. God’s grace is not situation specific (fixing the mess humans have made of things), but part of who God is and always has been.
4. If Jesus Christ has taken up our cause, by offering a faithful and obedient human response to God on our behalf, what is our response?
5. What does it mean for us to live lives that are marked by amazement, astonishment and worship at the grace of God?