

WEEKLY SERMON

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Full of Grace and Truth

John 1.10-18

It seems that the whole nation has been gripped by Strictly Come Dancing, but possibly nowhere more so than in Blackburn.

Blackburn has been cheering for AJ Odudu, daughter of this town, who is basking in the glory of her success and sharing in the disappointment of the injury which prevented her from taking part in the final.

AJ herself seemed to take it very stoically, graciously wishing the other contestants well, treating them as her colleagues rather than her competitors.

Grace is something we expect of dancers. Gracefulness of movement is pleasing, beautiful, and we might even call it a gift from God.

And grace permeates the text of the Bible. In the first chapter of John's Gospel we read that Jesus is 'full of grace and truth', that 'from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace' and that 'grace and truth came through Jesus Christ'. We can compare the Annunciation, when Gabriel tells Mary that she is the 'favoured one' or 'full of grace'.

When Jesus is on trial, Pontius Pilate asks 'What is truth?'

Grace and truth go together in John, so today we should perhaps ask 'what is grace?'

Grace is God's favour, demonstrated in his acts of mercy and forgiveness and love, supremely so in taking on human form to live amongst us.

Grace is that which sanctifies, saves, redeems: whatever word we want to use for that which brings us into a relationship with God.

And grace is above all something freely given, with no strings attached.

We do not deserve God's grace. In fact, we cannot deserve God's grace. Because if we did, and if we could deserve it or earn it, the giving and receiving of grace would become a transaction, whereas we understand it always to be a gift.

So where does Strictly fit in all of this? Well, of course it's a bit different, but the metaphor of dance is often used of God in the Orthodox Churches, particularly to describe the perfect, trusting, non-competitive relationship between the persons of the Trinity.

This is true gracefulness, true graciousness, true grace.

So, what is grace? It is of God and it is from God. It is all that is good. And it is what gives us hope. Because whether you can dance or not, through Jesus Christ we have all received grace upon grace.

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