

“PREPARE THE WAY – 2”

Jesus the Logo

John 1:1,14-18

As many of you will be aware, we’ve been working on a new website for the church over the past little while, looking to produce a new format and, along with it, a super-duper new logo, which you may remember occasioned a good deal of debate earlier in the year. I’ve always had a bit of a soft spot for logos and similar bits of graphic flotsam since having to design one as part of my O-level art exam many years ago and I used to read avidly copies of journals such as *Graphis* in the library of the French technical college where I taught. Today, even more than back in the early 1970s, logos are part and parcel of our lives. Close your eyes and think of McDonalds or Apple or Shell and you’ll probably see a symbol, the logo which we identify with the company or the product. From the time that the farmer first branded his cattle with his own distinctive mark and the stonemason carved his little symbol onto one of his creations, what we now call the logo has been an expression of brand identity.

The graphic design guru David Airey, who wrote the current industry text-book *LogoDesignLove* in 2015, talks of the logo as “*transcending boundaries*” – recognisable by all – as “*like putting a face to a name*” and “*having a unique quality or style that accurately portrays [the] client’s business perspective*”. It’s the way we eventually come to recognise a company or an organisation.

And yet, the word is a relatively new addition to the vocabulary of English, with the Oxford English Dictionary tracing back its first appearance on the scene to the mid-1930s. It’s actually a contraction of an older word, coined in the early 19th century – *logogram* – which was still being used as late as the mid-1960s. The definition of that word is effectively what we mean by the logo today – “*a symbol or device designed to represent in simple graphic form an object, concept or attitude.*”

But these words – and the similar “*logotype*”, another 19th century word used in printing to refer to a type used in creating a logogram – trace their roots back deep into the history of language, back to the Ancient Greek word *logos*. That word has had a huge influence on all kinds of concepts in many languages, quite apart from the humble logo. Originally it meant a “word”, a spoken utterance, but also came to mean “reputation” (as it was used by Heraclitus) and was widely used as a term in serious philosophical debate long before it ever appeared in John’s Gospel, from which Hattie read to us just now. As you may well be aware, Jesus is referred to by John in this amazing bit of writing, as the “*Logos*”, the word here translated “Word”.

Jesus is The Word. He is the means of God expressing himself. As we saw last week, just as God shouted into being the light in which the universe took root, so, at just the right time, God uttered the Word again as Jesus came into our dark world. If we want to update all this philosophical talk for today’s culture, we

can track the word back down the centuries to today, knock off the “s” and say that Jesus is God’s Logo. Remember those quotations from David Airey? Here is Jesus bursting into our world as God’s way of *“transcending boundaries”*. Here is Jesus enabling a confused and frustrated humanity to *“put a face to a name”* – Jesus was God becoming flesh, making himself known, given shape and character. Here is Jesus, with that *“unique quality and style that accurately portrays [God’s] business perspective”*. Jesus was God coming among us and making God known, as John says here in v18 – *“No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”*

Jesus came into our world that first Christmas time to express God’s brand identity, to show in his own life what was the very essence of God’s character and mission. And John helpfully tells us here what are the two fundamental aspects of that. In v14 he says that God the Father is *“full of grace and truth”* and then in v17 writes *“grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”*. Here is Jesus, the Logo, communicating to everyone what God is all about. In his life, his words, his activity, his death, his resurrection he encapsulates God’s grace and truth.

He brings God’s truth to us as he confronts us with the need to be reconciled to God. He tells us the truth about ourselves and God’s world – and about God himself, who is desperate to reach out to us and draw us back to himself. You see, we so easily deceive ourselves into thinking that everything is OK. Many people seem to have all they need – all they want, even. Life is sweet for so many, despite what’s going on around. In our part of the world we are well supplied with all that we need – and so much more besides. Our material needs and desires are met without too much difficulty. We have our education, our homes, our families. We’re well served by health services and private care plans. Our leisure facilities are all that we could want, from golf clubs to poetry groups to turbo trainers. Our pension pots are waiting for us and our long-term plans are all set up. Even, in these troublesome times, a vaccine will soon be available for us to help us get back to some kind of normality. We may have a slight, almost irritating, feeling that there could be something a bit more fulfilling and the odd doubt about what’s going to happen when we die, but, by and large, we’re OK.

Then Jesus comes along with God’s truth. That niggles about fulfilment is actually a realisation that you’re not living life to the full as God wants and as Jesus demonstrates. The odd doubt about what’s happening when you die is due to the fact that, as the Old Testament preacher puts it, *“God has set eternity in the hearts of everyone”* and you haven’t really taken that in to account. And then there’s the occasional hint we get that our lavish lifestyles are actually being made possible by the poverty of a fair proportion of the rest of the world and our consumer choices are actually gradually using up and wearing out our planet’s resources, so that future generations will pay a heavy price. Looking at Jesus as he grants us glimpses of

God's amazing Kingdom and listening to his words as he explains what it's all about and where it's all gone wrong, confronts us with the truth about God and about ourselves.

But at the heart of that truth is the second aspect of God's brand identity – his grace. Pointing out the truth about the breakdown in our relationship with God is all well and good, but the whole point is that, if we are to realise the potential that God has put within us, we need to respond to that truth. In sending Jesus the Logo into our world, God has shown that he is reaching out in undeserved love to bring us the offer of transformation. That's the whole point of Christmas. Whether we are wallowing in self-satisfied smugness about all that we've got and all that we've done, and managed to banish the niggling doubts from our minds by filling them with other ideas; or whether we're desperate to find some meaning in life and some satisfaction in all that we're doing; or whether we're totally confused and bewildered by the current pandemic and its consequences; or we're struggling to cope with broken relationships, lack of resources or grindingly stressful circumstances, God is saying in Jesus, "I love you. You matter to me. I want the best for you – and I'm prepared to do whatever it takes to help you see that."

Jesus came into our world as a bloodied and bawling baby, identifying with us in our fragile humanity, living with the vulnerability of a human body and the stresses of daily survival. But he grew to become someone who exemplified in his life and teaching all the grace and truth of his heavenly Father. He reached out to all in need and spoke about the way God wants us all to live, just to get the best out of the life he has given us. He brought healing and hope to so many and, as we've already said, showed us what life in God's Kingdom could be like if we take him seriously. And then he proved the sincerity of all that by going to the cross and taking on himself the consequences of our wrong decisions and flawed choices, freeing us from their influence and defeating the power of evil to hold us in thrall. Just a couple of days later, he roared back to life, showing that there was nothing, absolutely nothing, that could now prevent us from resetting our relationship with God. That was grace – amazing and astonishing grace; grace that triumphed and now transforms; grace that took the initiative and gave us a way back to God.

That's God's brand identity. It transcends all boundaries and reaches out to you, whoever you are and wherever you are and whatever you've done. Christmas is the time when God sent Jesus the Logo to make a difference to you. Listen to his truth and accept your need of him. Then dive into his grace and experience his love for yourself. If you'd like to find out more, get in touch with us, join our Alpha group, call out to God to make himself know to you. May this Advent and Christmas be the time you encounter Jesus and find yourself enfolded in the love of God, the God full of grace and truth.

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Jesus came into our world as a baby, identifying with us in our fragile humanity, living with the vulnerability of a human body and the stresses of daily survival. But he grew to become someone who exemplified in his life and teaching all the grace and truth of his heavenly Father. He reached out to all in need and spoke about the way God wants us all to live, just to get the best out of the life he has given us.

That's God's brand identity. Listen to his truth and accept your need of him. Then dive into his grace and experience his love for yourself.

For reflection and discussion

- 1) What are your favourite logos? What do you like about them? Why do we use them?
- 2) If we feel everything is OK with us at the moment, who spoil it with God's truth? How can we be sure of God's truth?
- 3) Why is it so important to balance truth with grace (and vice versa)?
- 4) How can we proclaim God's truth about humanity without appearing to be judgemental?
- 5) What is at the heart of God's "brand identity" for you? Why?