

In describing Jesus' coming into the world, John does not describe it like the other Gospel writers. Instead of focusing on the birth of Jesus, John describes it as a homecoming, saying, "He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him."

Can you imagine – your own people not accepting you? Can you imagine how Jesus felt, being rejected by the world he loves so much? It's unimaginable, isn't it?

And yet, to help us imagine it, I want to share video of a few successful homecomings. The joy we're about to see, the emotions it brings – they're just as powerful, even though it's the opposite emotion – joy instead of sorrow. Let's watch: Jesus "came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him." Somehow, the world which came into being through him did not know him. Jesus came home, but there was no loving response. The welcoming shout and joyous hug never materialized for him. The hearts of his people were closed.

This is the world we live in. A world that by-and-large rejects Jesus. As another Gospel writer named Mark says concerning the Living Word of God, "... The cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing." (Mark 4:19) Jesus too often gets left out in the cold because we are too busy tending to all our stuff, our desire for other things.

Another reason Jesus is not more fully embraced is found elsewhere in John, where it says, "...The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil." In other words, we let sin and temptation get in between us and Jesus. (John 3:19)

Sometimes, of course, it's not evil but rather fear that keeps us from shouting for joy about Jesus. We're afraid that if we tell people about Jesus – particularly people who don't seem to know him – they might reject us, just like the world rejects Jesus.

Or as John puts it, "... Many ... believed in him. But ... they did not confess it for fear that they would be put out" Putting our own sense of acceptance – our fear of rejection – ahead of our love for God and faithfulness to the Lord.

And then there are those people who don't think they need a savior. These are people who consider themselves to be basically good. They don't realize that they, like all people, are not able to come to God on their own terms, even though Jesus tells it plainly, saying, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

The bottom line is, we need Jesus, and the world needs to hear us proclaim it out loud, regardless of our station in life, the temptations we face, the fears we harbor, or the struggle we have sharing our faith with others.

There are a lot of ways we can be proclaiming our faith. And it's important that we do, that we speak up and tell people about the Lord. It's equally important – maybe even more so – that our choices and actions reflect our love of God and our faith in Jesus. The best way we can do that – ensure our words and actions are in line with our faith – is to speak and act in the Spirit of Christ, with the essence of Jesus is underlying all that we say and do.

What is the essence of Jesus, anyway, the core of who Christ is? Well, John tells us this plainly in today's scripture reading, saying, "From his fullness, we have all received grace upon grace." And truth. Grace and truth are the essence of who Jesus is, the fullness of Christ himself, through whom John tells us "grace and truth came" into the world.

How much we embrace grace and truth in this world is a reflection of how much we embrace Jesus in our lives. By making a stand for grace and truth, we make a stand for Jesus. And yet, ours is not a world of grace and truth, at least not enough. There is not enough grace and truth being shown and proclaimed, and this leaves vindictiveness and lying to rule the day. And that can be discouraging.

But knowing that Jesus is the essence of grace and truth, knowing that the world came into being through a divine expression of grace and truth, we know, we know that vindictiveness and lying will not get the best of this world. We know that grace and truth will prevail. And until it does – until Christ himself returns in the fulness of time to make all things new again – it is our calling in life, our mission as Christians to extend the grace of the Lord to all people and make a stand for divine truth at all costs.

Of course, it's not always easy to extend the grace of the Lord to some people. And knowing what's true, well, that nearly impossible these days. But that's our calling as children of God. And we can do it – we can overcome vindictiveness and lying with grace and truth. The Holy Word of God assures us of that, saying, "... His own people did not accept him but to all who received him, who believed in his name, (Jesus) gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God." "... And we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

Yes, people, "The Word became flesh and lived among us." Jesus born of Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit lives among us! Christ lives among us as the Living Word of God, guiding our actions and calling us as instruments of redemption, as we welcome Jesus into our hearts, and make a place for him in our homes. Amen.