

AHEAD INTO BEAUTY AND TRUTH

Thomas Robinson, *He Goes Ahead of Us 2*, April 27, 2014

JOHN 1:1-5, 14-18

¹In the beginning was **the Word**, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ **All things were made through him**, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ **In him was life**, and the life was the **light of all people**. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ...

¹⁴ And the **Word became flesh** and dwelt among us, and we have seen **his glory**, glory as of the **only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth**.

¹⁵ John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'"

¹⁶ For **from his fullness** we have all received, **grace upon grace**. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; **grace and truth** came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; **the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known**.

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9

⁴ **Rejoice in the Lord** always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. **The Lord is at hand**; ⁶ **do not be anxious** about anything, but in everything by **prayer** and supplication with **thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And **the peace of God**, which surpasses all understanding, will **guard your hearts and your minds** in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, **whatever is true**, whatever is **honorable**, whatever is **just**, whatever is **pure**, whatever is **lovely**, whatever is **commendable**, if there is any **excellence**, if there is anything **worthy of praise**, **think about these things**. ⁹ What you have **learned** and **received** and **heard** and **seen** in me – **practice** these things, and **the God of peace** will be **with you**.

MATTHEW 28:7

⁷ "Behold he is going ahead of you ... there you will see him."

GENESIS 1:1, 31

¹In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ... ³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

PSALM 16:11

¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; | in your presence there is fullness of joy; | **at your right hand are pleasures forevermore**.

PSALM 34:8

⁸ "Oh, **taste and see that the LORD is good!** | Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!"

PSALM 84:1-3

¹ **How lovely is your dwelling place**, O LORD of hosts! ² My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. ³ Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O LORD of hosts, my King and my God.

PHILIPPIANS 3:10-11

¹ I want to know him [Jesus] and the power of his resurrection, and share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any path possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19

¹⁷ As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on **God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy**. ¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in **good works**, to be **generous** and **ready to share**, ¹⁹ thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of **that which is truly life**.

Dark Night and Breaking Dawn

From Easter to Pentecost is a time for celebration and reflection on the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus. We are a resurrection people. We need to let that permeate us fully. Our theme comes from Mt 28:7, Jesus going ahead of his disciples. Ahead to Galilee, into all nations, into the future, beyond the power of death, into ultimate life. He goes ahead of us. The life that Jesus leads us to is not the general all-encompassing life of a pantheistic creation (All is divine, evil is only apparent not real). It is distinctly resurrection life. Life through and beyond death. It takes human brokenness, evil, sin, suffering, pain, confusion, all the power of death, very seriously. The Jesus who is raised is the wounded, crucified Jesus.

Both the night of the cross and the dawn of resurrection shape us. Jesus overflowed in self-giving love and faithfulness on the cross. That shapes a life of faithfulness and love for us. But he also brings God's ultimate purpose of renewal and re-creation into view in his resurrection, so that we know that brokenness and death do not have the last word. Cynicism and pessimism are not ultimately true. God's power of life is true beyond death.

Resurrection and the Song of Creation: Grace and Truth

Beauty and Truth: The resurrection speaks specific truths, not just about an event in a.d.30, but about the world and God. It asserts that God's love and grace encompass the whole story of our world. It points to a renewal of God's creation that reaches back to the deep reality of his creation of this astonishing, beautiful, thrilling, dangerous, meaningful world.

John 1 looks at the whole in the light of Jesus life, death, and resurrection. In him the creator and renewer of everything are seen: existence, light, life, action, involvement, love, overcoming darkness. "Grace and Truth came to be through Jesus Messiah." Here the face of God shown through. The light that illuminates all people. Here among us humans.

Paul in Phi. 4 reflects the same all-encompassing delight and peace as he reflects on Jesus. When your song is the song of the creator of everything, then nothing is outside your scope of interest. "Whatever is true...just...lovely." There are choices involved but not exclusions. There's a modern myth of the narrowness of religion. But real faith in the creator can deal with every reality in our world – science, art, experience, history – but it does not have to fit them all – even imagination, love, creativity – into the procrustean bed of materialism.

The Challenge of Beauty and Truth

Both truth and beauty are disputed terms in our time. "Post-modern" deconstruction has argued that every claim to truth is a reach for power and is ultimately oppressive. All "truth" is constructed. Still our desire for reality is insatiable. Jesus' story, in a sense, says yes, truth reaches beyond our world and senses and must be constructed for us to see it. But when we open our eyes to see its depth and beauty, it is the ultimate freedom – living in true reality.

Beauty, of course, can be trivial and deceptive. But there is a deep beauty that is a challenge. Why is anything beautiful to us? Why does food taste wonderful? Why does music move us? Why can a flower or a sunset be an almost mystical experience? Why can we discern beauty even in tragedy and suffering? Why does a great painting or poem feed our souls? Why our delight in imagination? Such connection is not necessary for survival or procreative success.

Grace, Beauty and Truth in Jesus point to a vast, complex, wonderful story. Beauty is in the character of our creator, whose image we bear. Yes, he uses all the wonderful, terrible evolutionary process that we can discern, and so much more. This world and life are also a gift and a song. There are dark passages, but resurrection lets us hear the glorious finale.