

The beauty of Orthodoxy

Well, this morning already we have been nourished by the gift of corporate worship – joining our hearts and voices together in proclamation and praise of our God and the gospel.

We have had the joy of witnessing two baptisms – public affirmations that the gospel is not just something we remember and celebrate, but something we experience today through the grace of God in Christ.

We've caught sight of God's work among us through a ministry like Alpha...

All of this because of what Jody and Lucy declared in their baptism – that **Jesus is Lord**.

This is our central confession and the essence of the gospel – **Jesus is Lord**.

If the gospel could be summed up in 3 words – that would be it: **Jesus is Lord**.

Jesus – the gospel is about a person – Jesus. God come to us in and as Jesus. The gospel is rooted in history – in the historical life and death of Jesus – who saves. That's what the name Jesus means.

Saving One.

Is – Not just was, but **IS**. Without this, the gospel would just be a memory, if that. But the gospel is real today because Jesus **is** alive today.

Alive as **Lord** – the rightful Ruler over all. The King of the Kingdom. This is what the gospel restores us to – the good and beautiful gift of having Jesus, the King of the Kingdom, as our Master – our Lord.

Jesus is Lord.

This is our Christian confession.

And this confession shapes our lives – sending us running to be baptized and then out together to worship and follow Jesus with our lives...

Now, if you read the **piece in the bulletin**, you'll know that we are starting this morning into a three-part conversation on our **core values** as a church – as Lambrick. An exploration of the three **deep commitments** that shape and inform all that we do... that shape and inform **how** we [and when I say we, I don't just mean the pastoral staff and I, but **us – all of us**] how **we** seek to worship and follow Jesus as a community.

And the first of our core values relates directly to what we've already been talking about – our core confession – Jesus Christ is Lord. Or even just the reality that we'd say we have a core confession.

For years, we've articulated this first core value as a committed to **Orthodoxy**.

Which is just a fancy term for **right beliefs, right worship, right thinking**.

Ortho being the greek word for *straight, correct or right*.

And **doxa** being a greek word for *worship or belief*.

We are guided by a deep commitment to **Orthodoxy**.

Historic Orthodox Christian Faith.

Which can sound like a rather uninspiring thing to make a **core value** – until we realize that **our understanding or perception** of reality profoundly shapes and affects who we are and how we live.

We've talked about this before.

Imagine my son is at the table with me for lunch and he's thirsty – desperately thirsty – and the juice is down on my end of the table. No matter how much I love him and would happily pass the juice to him, if he thinks, believes, perceives that I despise him and don't want anything to do with him, *he'd be unlikely to ask me to pass the juice*.

Our understanding or perception of reality profoundly shapes and affects who we are and how we live.

In a sense, everything else flows out of this.

And because of this – because our understanding or perception of reality profoundly shapes and affects who we are and how we live,

we're not interested in lies or half-truths. **We are a community that values and pursues Orthodoxy.**

*To put it another way: **we are a community of truth-seekers.***

We long to know **the truth** about God, about ourselves, about our world, about life and where it is found. And not just to know the truth, but to love the truth and to live in it.

This is what valuing Orthodoxy is all about...

Now the danger in stating this – in saying that this is one of our **core values** – is that we live in a day of **ugly orthodoxy and attractive heresy.**

A couple of years ago, I came across a statement about this and I'll never forget it. It actually comes from a portion of the website of Christianity Today, explaining a shift in their mandate in recent years. More on that in a minute, but first, I want you to consider these words and your response to them...

"When you take a look at the world today, you see a turn toward ugly orthodoxy and attractive heresy—truth spoken in shrill and unloving ways, falsehood spoken in winsome and compelling fashion. [Many of us are] discouraged by the direction of the cultural conversations from both outside and inside the church. All of the negativity has left the world in desperate need of truth, goodness, and beauty."

I'd be curious to hear your response to this statement about ugly orthodoxy and attractive heresy.

I know I encounter it – and have probably been dismissed at times due to an expectation that **I'd** represent one of these camps – probably the former because I'm not only a Christian, but a Christian **pastor**.

You know, it's telling when you meet a neighbour or friend-of-a-friend, and they ask about your line of work, and when you say, "Actually I'm a pastor of a church" – their response is to wince, or lean away, or withdraw, or keep to their side of the complex.

I've experienced it. It is a telling sign that they have probably encountered ugly orthodoxy more than they (and we'd) like.

But the issue isn't just ugly orthodoxy; the challenge is also **attractive heresy**.

In a study on Evangelical Christology I was reading earlier this year, I was struck with the reality of an observation. The author stated, "Today heresy and orthodoxy have changed roles. It is fashionable, not dangerous, to be a heretic, and dull if unsafe to be orthodox." (Harold Brown).

At least that's how things feel in our world today. And not just in the world, but in some of our circles of friends or places of work or neighbourhood conversations. Maybe even among our church-going friends.

But, as we've already seen, heresy – and by that I mean false or distorted ideas *about God, about ourselves, about life and what it means to be human* – though exciting in their novelty, are oppressive and destructive in their impact.

Because, as we've said, and as experience can attest, our understanding or perception of reality profoundly shapes and affects who we are and how we live.

Which is to say: **truth matters.** Hugely. Profoundly.

To build our lives on or around a lie – be that a lie spoken by our culture, our parents, our friends or our church – is a path to oppression and distortion.

As a wise pastoral theologian states it, "**Wrong knowledge** of God leads to broken and misshapen lives." (Andrew Purves)

Which is why **Orthodoxy** matters so much to Jesus and consequently to us as Christians and as a Christian church in Victoria in this day and age.

To return to my comments about Christianity Today – in the light of the growing prevalence of *ugly orthodoxy and attractive heresy*, a few years ago Christianity Today officially revised their aim to simply – **Beautiful Orthodoxy.**

To reveal the truth, goodness and beauty of Orthodoxy.

And I can't shake it. As the truth that many of us need to discover or rediscover - that **Jesus** longs for us to discover or rediscover. **And reveal...**

We sang it earlier in the words of the song "**Good Good Father.**"

I've heard a thousand stories of what they think You're like
But I've heard the tender whisper of love in the dead of night
You tell me that You're pleased and that I'm never alone.
*You're a Good Good Father - It's who You are.
And I'm loved by You - It's who I am.*

That's a glimpse of **Beautiful Orthodoxy** - and why it matters.

I remember walking through an incredibly difficult season in my life, just a few years ago - depression beating down on me, self-critical thoughts hanging over me, undoing my capacity to face the day.

And somewhere in the midst of it all, someone played that song for me - and everyday for the next month **those words** - the beautiful life-giving truth of God expressed in those words - sung in the backdrop of my heart and mind and soul.

And they lifted me. The **beautiful truth** stated in that song spoke **life** to me. Naming and casting out the lies that were crushing me and giving me hope to once again experience "*the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living*" (as Psalm 27:13 states).

The **beautiful truth of God** as a Good and Loving Father and **myself** as a beloved child of God liberated me from the oppressive lies that were crushing me.

That's the **beauty and power of Orthodoxy**.

Not that the truth is always easy for us to hear or what we want to hear. That's partly why heresy can be so attractive – it can take any shape we want it to.

The Apostle Paul described this centuries ago in his second letter to a young pastor named Timothy.

2 Tim 4:3f

"For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine [orthodoxy]. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths."

And let's be honest, our ears all itch at times. We **all** have desires that cause us to want the truth to bend a particular way.

But God is better than that. He loves us more than that.

As the song rightly says, **He is a Good Good Father** – which is to say that He knows what is best for us and that the truth is better than a lie. And so in His love, God speaks the truth to us... and calls us to live in the light of the truth.

In reality, *this is the call of the gospel*.

In Mark 1:14f, we read,

"After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news.'"

Repent. The greek word is *metanoia* – which literally means *think around this, think again, think in a new way in the light of what I'm saying and doing...*

*"Repent **and believe the gospel.**"*

From beginning to end, Jesus is deeply committed to leading us into the truth – *away from the lies that distort and destroy us and into the truth that brings life* – the truth of the Father, the truth about ourselves, the truth about life and where it is found.

That's why Jesus call us to learn from Him!

Not so we'll be smart or right in our thinking.

But so that we will would ***live in alignment with reality...*** That we would ultimately *love the Lord our God with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength, and love our neighbors as ourselves.*

That's the goal of Orthodoxy.

Which, if you think about it, is exactly what we see and experience **in Jesus, isn't it?**

Not some ugly know-it-all, but **Beautiful Orthodoxy in the flesh.**

That's what strikes me as I consider the reality and prevalence of ugly orthodoxy, in our day... Or even just stale, lifeless orthodoxy – which I'm sure many of us have encountered.

It's not what we see in Jesus. Just the opposite, in fact.

In Jesus we see the beauty of Orthodoxy. The beauty of seeing all things as God sees them.

Which is why, as a church, we come again and again **to scripture and to Jesus** as God's authoritative and trustworthy revelation of the Truth. And why we seek to read Scripture on our knees, asking continually for the Spirit's illuminating work.

Because who understands reality – the truth of God and humanity, the world and what it means to be alive – better than God Himself – the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of it all?

And in His Word – the story of scripture – He reveals this truth to us.

As the apostle Paul in **2 Timothy 3:16** famously states, "*All scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*"

Again we see the vital relationship between right thinking and right living.

If we long for truth, we must give our attention to **God's** revelation in Scripture...

And of all God's revelation – of all of God's Words – the Word that most clearly, most powerfully, and most fully reveals the truth to us is **Jesus Himself** – **the Living Word. *The Word made flesh...***

Which means then that, in the end – or rather from start to finish – the ***pursuit of Orthodoxy*** is really the ***pursuit of Jesus – who is the Truth...***

Seeking to know Jesus... Seeking to learn from Jesus... Seeking to live in Jesus – to grow as women and men, young and old, whose lives are aligned and alive with the Beautiful Orthodoxy of Jesus.

Bowing our minds and lives to all that He reveals – *about the Father, about ourselves, about relationships and what it means to really live* – through His teaching and ministry... through his life and his death...

Trusting and bowing to His authority as not only the One who knows the truth, but who is the Truth.

And not just on our own – but **together.**

And I don't say this just because we want to be a community, but because this is how Jesus by the Spirit has chosen to teach us

today – ***through the Word and through the Church*** – the body of Christ – today and down through the ages.

We need to wary of developing or rethinking our theology ***in isolation*** – not that every voice around us can be trusted, but ***neither can every voice within us.*** The search for the Beautiful Orthodoxy of Jesus calls us to the humility of listening to the wisdom of the Spirit in the life of ***the church*** – today and down through the ages.

And not just to listen, ***but to contribute.***

I've been struck this week with Paul's prayer in ***Colossians 1:9*** – where he prays (a prayer I pray all the time for us) – "*We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives...*"

His prayer reveals and affirms that ***the knowledge of God*** – True and Beautiful Orthodoxy – comes only ***from and by the Spirit*** – *through the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives...*

And yet Paul declares this ***in the midst of a letter of instruction*** – which becomes a part of Scripture for us – through which the Spirit speaks.

And then later in that very letter, Paul exhorts the Christians in Colossae to "*Let the message of Christ dwell among you ***as you teach and admonish another one*** with all wisdom through psalms, hymns*

and songs from the Spirit..." – Affirming that we experience the Spirit's teaching through the teaching and admonishment of the church – of one another...

All that to say, our pursuit of the Beautiful Orthodoxy of Jesus is not one we embark on alone, but **together**... trusting the Spirit to teach us together...

This is one of the reasons why I'm excited for us to dive into the **Rooted** journey next month. If you weren't with us last Sunday, I officially introduced this **10-week discipleship intensive** called ROOTED that we are inviting everyone to be a part of this fall.

And part of the beauty of ROOTED is that it will be an explicit opportunity for us to move beyond *good intentions* in our pursuit of Christ to truly engaging with God and one another on a deeper level – to study Scripture on our own and together – and to learn from the Spirit through it all.

Rooted is a way for us to live out our commitment to pursuing the Beautiful Orthodoxy of Jesus. I'm excited for us to enter into it.

invitation to the table -----

But right now, the call is for us to come again to Christ.

To come bow our minds – our thoughts – our perceptions and convictions to Christ... **Who alone knows all...**

And whose clear understanding of all, including our sin led Him to offer up His life on the cross – for us... Whose perfect

understanding of the Father's love led Him to lay down His life for us...
Whose clear understanding of the devil's deception led Him to display
in the most **unmistakable** way that God can be trusted and is worthy
of our full allegiance - our heart, our soul, our **mind** and our strength.

In his grace, Jesus invites us today,

*"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you **and learn from me**, for I am gently and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* (Matthew 11:28-30)