

John 1:14-18

"Who Is Jesus? Grace and Truth"

You remember this?....."You deserve a break today....so get up and get away to...."where?

McDonalds.

Well, it used to be, till they gave up the trademark for that slogan last year.

What's the MacDonald's slogan now? I don't know.... "Now delivering cold burgers and fries by Uber?"

Anybody here feel like you deserve a break today?

Anybody here feel like you **need** a break, whether you deserve it or not?

Deserve a break.....need a break you don't deserve...
The first is law, the second is grace.

"The law came through Moses," John says, "but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

You see the difference?

The law says, "here's how you're to live."
"You see this long list of things....you do this, and this, and this and this....you're good....you'll get a break...you earned it.

When I drug rep'ed for Pfizer, the Pfizer law said wear a suit.....make sales calls on 10 Doctors a day.

I dressed in my coat, tie, ticked those visits off the list....10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1.....yabba dabbo dooo....slide off the brontosaurus in the Bedrock quarry, pitter patter off for the rack of ribs and the break the law said I deserved.

It was a nice arrangement. I knew how to please them, I did what they asked, they did what they promised to do if I did what they asked....which was pay me.

This was fine, as long as it was something I could manage.

A lot of people relate to God this way.

God expects certain things from me.

There's a list of things. It's usually a pretty short list.

I'll do them, and he will take care of me in return.

But suppose that Pfizer had decreed that in order to get a break, I'd have to make 50 sales calls a day....a hundred sales calls a day.

Now the law has become burdensome.

It is burdensome because I am unable to fulfill the law....

I may try, but I am not able.

With every passing day, I'm deeper in debt, Saint Peter don't you call me, cause I can't go, I owe my soul to the company store....further behind.

The law of God that came through Moses is this way.

It's clear and demanding, and absolutely impossible for us to keep.

This will come as news for some people.

You think you're doing just fine.

You have your short list...

You haven't murdered. You haven't committed adultery, you haven't stolen, you are a good person.

You have the added advantage of making your list, checking it twice not just to see how you're doing, but to determine how everybody else is doing, according to your list....just who is naughty and just who is nice.

You see?

Some people love the law for this reason.

They can use it to justify themselves and to judge and condemn those others who don't measure up.

But here's the problem.

If you're one of those people who think that you're keeping up their end of the bargain with God and thus, deserve the break you expect from him....you just don't know how long and demanding the law list is.

We tend to think of sin as doing something wrong. But hear this, from the book of James: "The person who knows what is **right** to do and does not do it...that is a sin." Uh oh.

Or this, from Jesus: "You have heard it said, You shall not kill...but I tell you whoever utters "You fool," is guilty of murder and destined for the fire of hell;

Or this: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Or this, from James: "Whoever keeps the whole law but stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking it all."

Or this, from Jesus: "you must be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect."

You know what it comes down to?

God, through his law, is demanding a gazillion sales calls a day.....I hate to break the news to you....but the measly 10 you manage aren't going to hold up.

No one can hold up. Not in this room, not in this church, not even our saints, like Rosalyn, not in this town, or in this time or any other time.

No one, by the law, deserves a break today or any other day.

Now if I were you, I'd be wondering by now what's going on here.

How did the preacher come to hijack the Christmas Cantata, which is, after all, titled "JOY!" with such as this?

"I came counting on the choir singing "Mary had a baby, oh yeah," and we're getting Eeyore whining "the wages of sin is death."

I hear you.....relax, Mary and the baby are coming, and I've almost finished...it's just this:

Unless and until you and I understand just how hopeless our dilemma was and is and always will be before God, Christmas will be little more than a sentimental baby powder sweet tale to drag out once a year;

an excuse for taking a binging, buying, blinging, singing break we feel we deserve to escape from the daily grind of our quarry.

I didn't deserve a break this week, but I sure needed one.

I had trouble carrying out even the equivalent of the 10 measly sales calls.

On Monday night, I completely forgot to attend the wake for Art Baldwin at Haskins Funeral Home.

That night, the hobgoblins woke me up at 2:30 in the morning....that's my name for all the voices whispering...."I'm something you said you would do, but you have not done."

My scripture readings in my morning quiet times all week long piled on the judgment:

One, from the book of Second Peter, pointing the finger at false teachers who fall from grace, abandon the commandments they know are right, and thus become "like a dog returning to its vomit or a sow that after a wash, rolls in the mud again."

See what I mean?

I needed a break. So I made my way to St. Mary.

There will be more time another time to tell you about this, but for now, I'll tell you that the Catholic Church has been a haven and help to me for more than 20 years, from the time I wandered into Sacred Heart Cathedral in Raleigh accidentally, thinking I was going to Good Shepherd Episcopal, across the street and found that all the slander I'd heard and repeated about Catholicism was basically crap.

In the 30 minute daily worship, I gather with a dozen or so others, we sing a hymn (badly), pray quietly, hear three readings from scripture, pray the Lord's Prayer, hear a godly homily from a man who has taken a vow of

poverty, chastity, and obedience before God, and kneel before the Body and Blood of Christ, which I do not receive, as I am not a Catholic, but revere as others do.

After the Monday night hobgoblins, I needed a break....and went to church on Tuesday.

Father Alex read the gospel text and because God has a sense of humor, it was about the two sons....asked by their father to go to the field...one said yes, and did not go, the other, refused at first, and then went.

"Which of these did the will of his Father?" Jesus asks?

Father Alex, weary with Advent busyness and seasonal preacher weariness, reflected on the burden of those who promise much to the Father, but who fail to live up to our promises.

He ended by pointing to our need for God's grace.

And then, came the break I needed, but did not deserve.

If this break were the only thing that happened in the entire 30 minutes, that would be enough.

The congregation prays a prayer for a break.

It goes like this: "Lamb of God, who comes to take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us"....you hear that? "Give us a break."

Lamb of God who comes to take away the sin of the world, give us a break....again.

Lamb of God, who comes to make the gazillion calls we cannot make on our own, grant us peace from the hobgoblins....

There is silence then, and the silence is broken by a break....literally.

Father Alex takes the host, Jesus' body, raises it, and snaps it in half.

It sounds like bones breaking.

"Behold the Lamb of God, He says.

Behold him, who comes to take away the sin of the world. Happy are those who are called to the supper of the Lamb."

And then the congregation:

"Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof. But only say the word, and my soul shall be healed."

No voice....but the word is said, the host is broken again, snapped into 4ths to be distributed to the people.

He is the break we need, but cannot deserve. He is all the break we need.

And this is Christmas, you see, waiting for **the Word** to be spoken in flesh, for the break we need.

This is why Jesus was born, to give a break to those who could never in a million years of trying, deserve it or him.

There is no joy on earth greater than knowing this truth, receiving it, and giving your life in glad response to him.

