

Well everyone, I know you are a church who definitely joins in with things, so this morning I'm going to try something that I've never done before. I want you to join in if you know the words :

You better watch out
You better not cry
You better not pout
I'm telling you why
Santa Claus is coming to town

He's making a list
He's checking it twice
He's gonna find out who's naughty or nice
Santa Claus is coming to town

He sees you when you're sleeping
He knows when you're awake
He knows if you've been bad or good
So be good for goodness sake

You better watch out
You better not cry
You better not pout
I'm telling you why
Santa Claus is coming to town

Well done everyone for joining in. It got me thinking a lot about how Santa operates. Have you been on the good list or have you maybe been on the naughty list? You know when I was growing up my mum used to always check for weeks before Christmas Day that I had been on the best of behaviour, and even on Christmas eve when I couldn't sleep my mum would say that if I didn't get to sleep Santa would know and wouldn't come to our house. It was terrifying.

I wonder today do we know whether some of our adults should be on the good list or the naughty list?

[Pick a few people, and ask the congregation to gauge where they think the person is]

It was always said that children that were on the good list got all their presents, and the children that were on the naughty list would have got a lump of coal. And there's a film that maybe some time over the holidays you can watch – it's called Fred Claus. It tells the story of Santa who has a brother called Fred. Fred is in lots of bother and so he phones his brother Santa for help. Santa agrees to help him but on one condition; that he comes to the North Pole to help him get ready for Christmas.

When Fred gets there, Santa gives him a really important job. He has to read through all the letters from children, and decide whether they have been naughty or nice. But as Fred begins the job he realises that something is wrong. The children that seem to be naughty are not naughty at all. Yes they may have done naughty things, but Fred can see that there is something special in every child. And the reason at times they are naughty is because they have maybe been hurt by someone in the past or misguided by someone. Fred therefore comes to the conclusion that the children that need the gift the most are the ones who are

considered naughty. He thinks to himself that maybe giving them a gift will make a huge difference to them and how they behave.

Fred wants to give them a gift even though to many they may not deserve it.

When it comes to Jesus, he calls that grace. We receive his love and his forgiveness in our lives even when maybe we don't deserve to receive it. That's grace.

But let's think for a moment about whether Jesus is like Santa or not, because I don't think he is like Santa really. You see when Jesus was walking on this earth, did he spend all of this time with really good people?

He actually spent a lot of time around people who others thought were not good – he spent time with people who collected taxes, he spent time with people like Samaritans who the Jews thought were not going to receive any blessing from God, and he spent time with poor and hungry people whom society rejected.

Those in society who were considered to be really good, like the religious leaders – the Pharisees, may have looked good but in their hearts they judged people, they made up their own rules to suit themselves. And Jesus actually fought against them, even though society considered them to be important good people.

You see Jesus doesn't operate like Santa Claus does. We might think that he goes around measuring like this scale how good we are, and dependent on that we get more points for heaven. Some people think that God is checking whether we have done enough in life in order that we get more from him. Others think that God is watching every move we make and when we are disobedient he comes down on us like some strict teacher. Some of us have a Santa Claus view of God this Christmas, that if we perform the way he wants we will get more from him. And we end up getting totally exhausted because you'll never be able to satisfy Santa Claus fully. After all none of us are perfect.

But this Christmas remember that Jesus, God's only Son, came to be with us here on earth, because we've all been naughty and all of us from time to time are not nice, and everyone of us has fallen short of what God hopes our lives to be. He came not to condemn any of us, or judge us on whether we are good enough, he came because he loves us and therefore wants to save all of us (John 3:17).

Today is the day when we celebrate not how good we have been, but how good he is to us. It's not about what we have done; it's about what he has done in coming to this earth to free everyone of us, through his grace, from what all of us really deserve.

Grace today means that everything you hope to be and do in life, Jesus does it for you because we can't. And the grace that God gives you is not just a little, he gives you loads and loads. He says I'm not going to give you half a cup, no. Because you are so precious to me, because you are made in my image, I'm not just going to give you $\frac{3}{4}$ of grace. I'm going to keep on give you, it's going to overflow. It's going to keep overflowing.

If today you realise that amount of grace, the undeserved love that Jesus has for you day after day after day, then today this Christmas Day say a massive thank you to God for sending Jesus, the best present you could ever wish for.

25th December 2021 Naughty or Nice