

Devotions – July 12-18, 2015
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Retired Pastor - Appleton, WI

Sunday, July 12, 2015

Grace 101

Text: 2 Corinthians 1:2 NRS

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Once settled in Appleton, Marv, my husband, and I began scouting out ELCA Lutheran congregations nearby our home. There were several of them, but we joined and began getting involved in the mission and ministry at Grace Lutheran Church in Appleton.

Just the name *Grace* Lutheran Church dug into my heart and sent me on a pilgrimage of sorts that has lured me into not only thinking about grace and what it is, but experiencing God's grace in a fresh way that has been energizing and renewing.

Each day we share these devotions, there will be a Bible text to read, a short comment, a question for you to ponder throughout the day, and a prayer.

Question for today:

If God's grace is sufficient, what happens to all my needs and wants?

Let us pray:

Fill us with your grace, O God, and enable this grace to be evident in all we do and say. Use us to call others to your table of grace where you offer all that gives us life; through Jesus Christ. Amen.



Monday, July 13, 2015

Hot Chocolate Grace

Text: Matthew 19:13-15

Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." And he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

Earlier this summer I was driving down College Avenue and watched as Dad and daughter left a corner coffee shop – hand in hand – and began walking along the sidewalk. In Dad's other hand

was a grande size cup of some kind of coffee. In the daughter's other hand was a small coffee cup filled with something. I imagined it was filled with hot chocolate. The two practically skipped along occasionally glancing at each other and sometimes taking a sip of their brew. The daughter was probably seven or eight years old.

I'm thinking that she was learning from her Dad that great tradition of sharing a cup of coffee and how good it feels to do that with someone who loves us. And, while I watched them I hoped that this Dad was passing along the Christian faith in the same way he was passing down coffee traditions to his daughter in his manner that was filled with love and grace.

Question for today:

With whom can I share a word of grace with today?

Let us pray:

Gracious and loving God, reveal to me the opportunities you set before me to speak a word of grace to someone else. Use my voice to bring your word of grace and love to others. Allow me to be your servant. Amen



Tuesday, July 14, 2015

Oh, the Burdens I Love to Hold On To



Text: Psalm 23

This sheep escaped shearing for 6 years. When he was found and clipped, it took 28 minutes to shed 60 pounds of wool. That's enough to make 20 suits. Look at those tiny legs and feet barely visible under all that wool. Something so good and helpful in providing warmth for sheep and clothing for humans had become a burden.

Which makes me wonder what burdens I am carrying around that I really could let go. Some of those burdens may even have started out as good or helpful, but have grown out of control to be burdensome and heavy. Like the one who clipped the 60 pounds of wool off this sheep, God's grace lifts our burdens onto his shoulders where he carries them for us. Sometimes he even carries us.

Question for today:

When has God's grace eased a burden in the past for you? Is there a burden in your life now that needs the touch of God's grace?

Let us pray:

Lord, you are gracious and merciful. Open my heart to accept your mercy and grace so that the burdens of my life can be eased. Use me to ease the burdens of others by letting your light shine through me. Amen.



Wednesday, July 15, 2015

Amazing Grace

Text: Ephesians 2:4-9

*But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ —by grace you have been saved - and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come **he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.*

Last winter I began having panic attacks in icy parking lots. I would take a few steps, see an icy patch, and a sense of panic would begin to rise. My legs would begin to shake. It would seem as if I could not move without danger of falling. Well, one December afternoon I headed to the mailbox. We hadn't checked it for a few days and I wanted to see what bills were waiting for us out there. The box was full! I immediately began to panic about how I would carry all that mail inside as well as what I would do if I dropped any of the pieces. My legs began to shake a little. Then a lot. Finally uncontrollably as I clung to the mailbox.

Marv had been watching from the living room window and now burst out the garage door with his walker in hand and announcing in a loud voice, "Honey, I'm coming!" And so he did make his way to the mailbox and me to bring me home.

More than once, Jesus has *brought me home* and saved me from danger and harm. The day will come, too, when he comes to bring me to that eternal home in heaven. That's amazing grace!

Question for Today:

What triggers panic in your heart or mind or body? Can panic be a sign to reach out to Jesus?

Let us pray:

Beautiful Savior, you come to us in our joys and sorrows, in calm and in panic offering grace wrapped up in whatever it is we need at the moment. Prepare us to receive these gifts and honor them wisely. Amen



Thursday, July 16, 2015

A Day Full of Grace

Text: Ephesians 1:1-6

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Way back in 1991 I adopted a special needs third grader who was eight years old. A system of rewards and consequences went a long way in helping him to manage his behavior. If I was consistent, it was predictable with no surprises. Well, real life is full of surprises – lots of them fun and some adventurous.

But this particular night, Shaun and I were having a terrible and challenging evening. He couldn't or wouldn't follow even one simple direction or finish a time out. Words of warning were not effective. Words that would remind him of the consequences only intensified his actions. The law of rewards and consequences could not reach his heart with love that night. But when we sat down on the steps and began to talk about being a family that would always love and accept each other, he began to relax and settle down. That night Shaun's heart began to soften. He cried.

I guess that Jesus reminds us of his love for us so many ways and times it is an indication that we need to hear it long and loud. We do better when we are confident of God's love and grace.

Question for today:

Is there an area of your life where you are still trying to earn God's love?

Let us pray:

Precious Lord, take my hand and hold me close and tight. Pour out upon all your people the courage to invite others to experience your love and grace. Amen.



Friday, July 17, 2015

Forgiveness

Text: Matthew 18:21-22

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times."

Forgiveness matters! It matters for the one who was offended and it matters for the one who did the offending. Forgiveness means freedom. It doesn't mean whatever action was done is now okay. It doesn't mean things will go back to the way they used to be. It does mean we can move forward and begin again. One of the perks of forgiveness is a clear conscience.

At a point when I was serving in parish ministry I said some things about a parishioner that were inappropriate and, in the end, not true. I struggled for days trying to find another way to handle it that didn't include going to her and asking for forgiveness. Well, there wasn't any other way, so the following afternoon I went to see this kind and compassionate woman. She had already heard about what I had said. Turning as red as a beet, I squeaked out an apology. I'll never forget it! She put her hand on my head and announced to me: "You are forgiven!"

And, I knew I was forgiven! I knew God's grace had been showered upon us.

Question for today:

How do you usually respond when someone seeks forgiveness from you?

Let us pray:

Great and gracious God, the reality of sin makes a mark on our lives and the lives of others every day. Keep us seeking forgiveness and make us ready to forgive others. Amen



Saturday, July 18, 2015

Peace

Text: John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Jesus bestows grace in the gift of peace.

Many years ago now, way back when I spent several summers as a camp counselor at a Wisconsin Bible camp, there was a tornado scare in the middle of the night. With flash lights providing enough light to see, the entire camp of about 200 kids and staff headed to the designated shelter area and waited. Yes, there was a storm. It wasn't a tornado, but it did make lots of noise. There were way many more frightened and scared folks in that area than those who remained calm. Then a small group of campers began singing: *Peace I leave with you my friend; Shalom my peace in all you do. Peace I leave with you my friend. I give to you so you can give to others too.* A miracle happened. That space in the midst of a BIG storm was filled with peace. We all knew it.

Before the three verses were sung, the storm passed. We got up to make the walk back to our cabins. The first light of dawn was just beginning to appear. Branches were down all around. Some of the shingles were missing on some of the cabins. But we all had been kept safe and at peace. This was God's doing. Peace in the midst of storms – tornado storms or life storms. We can count on God to bestow his peace.

Question for today:

Where has God bestowed grace/peace in my life?

Let us pray:

God of all peace: You are the giver of every good gift and you bestow these gifts abundantly and freely. Enable us to value these gifts and see them at work in the world. Amen.

