

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
September 20, 2020 16th Sunday after Pentecost

Words of Welcome

To you grace may be what you say before a meal, but it is so much more than that. It really is an incredible gift from God. Jesus told a parable about workers in a vineyard that has been a source of frustration and consternation for many over the centuries. Maybe today we can get a glimpse of how that parable demonstrates God's generosity and grace. We begin with a call to worship.

Call to Worship

In the prayers and the praise, in the words and the wonder:

we are given enough joy to live each day.

In the justice for the oppressed, in the unexpected generosity for the lost:

we are given enough compassion to use in service each day.

In the promises made to all, in the mercy offered to each:

we are given enough grace to share each day.

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Hymn

Before the world began

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| <p>1. Before the world began
one Word was there;
grounded in God he was,
rooted in care;
by him all things were made;
in him was love displayed;
through him God spoke, and said,
"I am for you."</p> <p>3. The Word was in the world
which from him came;
unrecognized he was,
unknown by name;
one with all humankind,
with the unloved aligned,
convincing sight and mind,
"I am for you."</p> | <p>2. Life found in him its source;
death found its end;
light found in him its course,
darkness its friend,
for neither death nor doubt
nor darkness can put out
the glow of God, the shout:
"I am for you."</p> <p>4. All who received the Word
by God were blessed;
sisters and brothers they
of earth's fond guest.
So did the Word of Grace
proclaim in time and space
and with a human face,
"I am with you."</p> |
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Opening Prayer

Generous and merciful God, we come to worship you, to learn, to grow in our understanding of how to live our lives in relationship to you and others. Some come with grief, despair, and pain, while others are filled with joy, good news, and energy. Life ebbs and flows and so we come as we are, amazed by your abundant grace and

overflowing love for every person regardless of standing in another's eyes. You surprise us with your willingness to forgive and restore us.

©Joyce Yanishewski written for the 16th Sunday after Pentecost, Year A. September 20, 2020.

God, you are the giver of all good gifts, yet we confess that our own generosity is limited. We share what we have, but often reluctantly. We complain about our lot.

We compare ourselves to others and see what they have that we lack. We fear running short of things rather than trusting your attention to our needs.

Forgive us our worries about tomorrow and give us generous hearts that trust in you.

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Open the scriptures to us, be present with us in this time of worship and may we experience your love and healing this day. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

This is the good news: there is no ranking in God's kingdom.

God graces everyone with the same gifts: mercy, restoration, new life.

God has kept the covenant. We have been forgiven, we have been made new people. Thanks be to God. Amen

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Scripture Reading Matthew 20:1-16

'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; ⁴and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. ⁵When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. ⁶And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" ⁷They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." ⁸When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." ⁹When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ¹⁰Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹²saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." ¹³But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'

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The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message The Incredible Gift of Grace

Back in 2015 a Credit Card Processing Company in Seattle made the news for giving employees a raise. Dan Price, the CEO of the company decided that he would pay all of his workers a minimum salary of \$70,000 a year after realizing that many of his younger employees were struggling to pay student loans and other obligations. He did this mostly by cutting out his large bonus. The New York Times ran a lengthy article on the many reactions from employees, clients, colleagues and others.¹

The article reported, “Two of Mr. Price’s most valued employees quit, spurred in part by their view that it was unfair to double the pay of some new hires while the longest-serving staff members got small or no raises. Some friends and associates in Seattle’s close-knit entrepreneurial network were also piqued that Mr. Price’s action made them look stingy in front of their own employees.”²

There were critics who thought it was just a publicity stunt and others who criticized him for having a socialist agenda. He lost clients, but he also gained clients. No matter what, his commitment caught the attention of many around the globe and everyone had an opinion.

Think about it for yourself. How would you feel if you had been in a job for 10 maybe even 20 years and a new hire was given a wage equal or nearly equal to your own? Ten to one you would think it unfair and be ready to quit in frustration. What kind of thanks is that? There is no scenario where we would think it fair that someone who has given so much to a company, project, or organization should not be rewarded. If a new hire got a living wage, then you would be anxious to see what benefit you would reap from the years of dedication and hard work. Would that not be fair?

Now, you may have a little more understanding of what was going on in that vineyard on the day when the landowner hired some workers first thing in the morning, and then a few more later in the day, and a few more at the end of the day. In fact, he went and hired four more times during the day after the initial agreement with the first labourers. Remember, the people who wanted to be hired were waiting, some waiting all day. They hadn’t given up, they hadn’t left, they were not lazy, they waited in hope that someone would hire them. Think also of those who are often hired last even today, the elderly, the disabled, those that others deem somehow not valuable, the uneducated.

Anyone in their right mind would expect that the workers who had were hired later in the day would be paid by a sliding scale in comparison to those who had worked the whole day. Those who had worked the shortest amount of time should only be getting a portion of what was considered the usual daily wage. But remember, the landowner only

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/02/business/a-company-copes-with-backlash-against-the-raise-that-roared>.

Accessed September 19, 2020.

² Ibid.

promised the first labourers that he would pay the usual daily wage, and they were okay with that. As he hired more people, he just said to them “I will pay you whatever is right.”

So, when it was time to get paid, the landowner starts with those who had been hired last and worked his way to those who had been hired first. You can almost feel their anticipation. Surely if the others were paid a day’s wage then those who had been at work all day would get a larger amount than they had agreed to. A little bonus if you please. But the land owner handed them the agreed to amount, the usual daily wage. Everything in us sides with the grumbling labourers who had “borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat”. We can’t get pass how unfair this seems. What kind of a story is this?!

Well, it is a story, a parable, that demonstrates God’s incredible gift of grace. Some call it the scandal of God’s divine grace. A professor at Luther Seminary in Minneapolis, Rolf Jacobson says this, “If you understand how much you don’t deserve grace and the incredible gift it is, and...you are overwhelmed with gratitude for the grace you are given, that another should also be give it is in defensive. It is the very nature of grace.”³

The thing about grace is that it cannot be earned. There is nothing you can do to make God give you grace or even more grace than another. Grace is a gift freely and abundantly given by God. It is possible for every human being to receive grace so long as they believe in God and realize just how much they don’t deserve it. Because let’s face it, not one of us is free from the guilt of having done something to hurt or wrong another human being.

Some might sit on a Sunday morning and think, I am such a good person for having shown up, I live and honest and upright life, but the truth is that those of us in these pews and me up in the pulpit are hopefully here because we recognize how much in need of God’s grace we truly are. We are able to be honest with ourselves and trust that the reason we know God’s love is because we also accept God’s grace. And to accept God’s grace is to acknowledge that you don’t really deserve it.

Let’s expand this a little more. Those who are on the front steps, damaged and homeless, are as important to God as you and I, and God’s grace is freely available to them. That is difficult enough, but God’s grace is also freely given to the swindler, murderer, liar, cheat. The caveat for all of us is that God’s grace should also change us. If you have received God’s grace and you realize just how much you don’t deserve it, you are changed, even transformed by it. One cannot continue as they are, inflicting harm and doing damage, and say that they believe in God. In receiving this generous gift, we are overwhelmed with gratitude and a desire to become more and more like the person God intended us to be.

Grace is the means by which we can be in relationship with God. Grace is the means by which we heal relationships with others and help others to heal. Grace is the means by

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CozLm6z5Go&t=539s>. Accessed September 17, 2020.

which we are healed, renewed, and transformed. One cannot experience grace and not change. You may stumble, but you will want to do better. Again, it is not that you can earn God's grace, but that in receiving it you are changed.

One might think, well I have been attending church all my life. I have always believed in God. I am deserving of God's grace, surely far more than someone who has never believed or is a new Christian and just learning, or decided on their death bed that rather than take a chance they will believe in God before they go. But this is just not how it works, God's grace is for those who have believed all their lives, for those who are at the end of life, and all those in-between. So, why should you not just wait until you are on your way out to say okay God, I'm yours?

For starters, most of us don't get to choose when we are going to die. Secondly, peace, love, hope, and joy, are all part of the gift of grace, and the longer you live as a Christian who recognizes just how incredible the gift of grace is, the more you will have opportunity to live with peace, love, hope, and joy, in your heart, mind, and body. The person who decides to let God have them just before they die, has missed a lifetime of opportunity to know God and experience grace.

To be known as a child of God is to know love deeper, wider, higher, and longer, than you can imagine. To be a child of God is to have hope even when things are bleak, not because you don't realize the challenges of any given situation, but because you know that you have the strength through Christ to find a way through. To be a child of God who has received the gift of grace is to have peace even when the circumstances appear to be or are chaotic.

I quote Rolf Jacobsen once more, where he writes, grace is "the free gift in which God gives all – eternal life, forgiveness, purpose, meaning – to human beings."⁴ This is why there is reason to share the gospel with others. This is why we can give thanks and live a lifetime as productive, joyous, Christians. We have been given eternal life, forgiveness, purpose, and meaning through God's grace.

Going back to the parable, God wants to give all the same gift of grace no matter how underserving they appear, just as the landowner paid everyone the same. It doesn't make sense. It messes with our understanding of fair play and justice. And yet, we receive grace from God on the basis that we are human beings, children of God. In being recipients of that grace may we be gracious to others, not because they deserve it but because they too are precious in God's sight. Accept God's grace today and be changed. Amen.

Closing Prayer

God of Hope,
When the world is bleak and dim, you pierce the shadows with light.
You help us see new paths and possibilities.

⁴ Jacobson, Rolf A., Editor. *Crazy Talk: A Not-So-Stuffy Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Augsburg Book. Minneapolis. 2008. P78.

For hope in times of despair, for clarity when we felt confused,
for a way forward when we thought all was lost, we give you thanks.
We pray today for those who feel hopeless; for those who are sick or dying;
for those who mourn; and for those weighed down by heavy burdens.
May each of us know and share your gift of hope.

God of Peace,

All around us there is conflict: in our world, our communities, our families, even our
closest relationships. We thank you for steps toward reconciliation in our lives, our
communities, and among peoples of different cultures and histories.

We pray today for places where pain, violence and cruelty seem to have the upper
hand.

May each of us know and share your gift of peace.

God of Joy,

We give you thanks for moments of delight and occasions of celebration;
for happy gatherings, gentle solitude, pleasure given and received;
for laughter, friendship, and love.

We remember those who do not taste such joy; those who are lonely or bitter, hurt,
or difficult to love.

May each of us know and share your gift of joy.

God of Love,

In Jesus Christ, your love was born in a human life. Jesus was rooted in a particular
family, yet his love stretched far beyond to include outsiders and those rejected by
others. We are so grateful to be part of his circle.

We pray for our families, those closest to us and anyone estranged.

We pray for friends and for acquaintances, strangers, for those very different from
ourselves, and even for our enemies.

Help us draw our circles of affection wider, seeing our kinship with all people.

May each of us know and share your gift of love.

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Hear us now as we pray in silence for those who have come to mind this day.

And now, in one voice, we pray the prayer that Jesus taught.

Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be
done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver
us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and
forever. Amen.**

Invitation to make an offering

We offer our gifts, not with grumbling under our breath about what God might do with them, but with thanks that God will use them to bring healing, hope, grace, and peace to all whose lives are empty of such needs.

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Hymn

Lord, the light of your love is shining

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1. Lord, the light of your love is shining
in the midst of the darkness, shining;
Jesus, Light of the World, shine upon us.
Set us free by the truth you now bring us.
Shine on me; shine on me.

Refrain
Shine, Jesus, shine;
fill this land with the Father's glory;
blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow;
flood the nations with grace and mercy;
send forth your word, Lord, and let there be light!
2. Lord, I come to your awesome presence,
from the shadows into your radiance;
by your blood I may enter your brightness.
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness.
Shine on me; shine on me.

Refrain
3. As we gaze on your kingly brightness,
so our faces display your likeness,
ever changing from glory to glory;
mirrored here may our lives tell your story.
Shine on me; shine on me.

Refrain

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Benediction

Go in peace, in the knowledge of God's power.
Go in confidence, in the knowledge of God's strength.
Go in joy, in the knowledge of God's love and grace. Amen.