

**The 2018 Lenten Devotional
"The Word of Grace"**

**St. John's Lutheran Church and School
505 South Park Road
La Grange, Illinois 60525
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**Worship
Sundays 8:00 & 10:45 a.m.**



**2018
ST. JOHN'S LENTEN DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET**

The Word of Grace

An Introduction to Our Devotional Booklet

The season of Lent is our yearly reminder of how desperately we need Jesus. We may think we're doing alright. Things may be going great. We may think of ourselves "more highly than we ought to think" (Romans 12:3). But it's a facade. Deep down we know things are not right in our world, in our lives, in ourselves. All of this because of our sin. When we are faced with our sin and its consequences, when we run up against our limits, when we cannot do anything more, we cry out to our Lord, "Save us!" But why should He listen? Why should He save us? Why does He not just leave us in our pitiful state or, worse, punish us for rebelling against Him?

The answer is grace. It has been often stated that grace is *"God's Riches At Christ's Expense"*. Yes, Jesus is the fullest picture of God's grace to us. Jesus is the One who came among us, suffered and was crucified...all for us. All for our sin. All to give us hope in midst of the deepest darkness we know.

That's where the Word of God, the Bible, comes in. Both God's grace and Jesus are revealed at the center of every single one of its pages. Whether things are going great or we are drowning in the darkness of sin and death, God speaks to us through His Word, speaks to us His grace in Jesus. For our Lenten journey this year, we will be talking a walk through God's Word in two ways. First, we will travel through both the Old Testament and the New Testament, looking at passages and verses that, in both overt and subtle ways, reveals God's grace, pointing to Jesus as our much needed Savior from sin. Treading through some familiar, but always striking, passages and verses will keep us grounded in the central message of the Bible: Jesus given for our salvation. Second, we will "walk the road with Jesus" as we look at passages and verses for each day of Holy Week. We will begin with Jesus riding into Jerusalem on Sunday, then follow Him each day of the week, right through the cross and to the empty tomb. In this way, we will see and experience first-hand the depths of God's love for us...and the full expression of His grace.

I pray that this journey through God's grace-filled Word will keep your eyes on Jesus, "the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2), throughout your Lenten journey!

Reflections

LENTEN *Schedule*

Midweek Lenten Worship Services

Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m.

(February 21—March 21)

A Lenten Midweek Series based on the Passion of St. Mark

2/21: Give Up...Your Limitations (Mark 14:1-9)

2/28: Give Up...Your Pride (Mark 14:26-31)

3/7: Give Up...Control (Mark 14:43-50)

3/14: Give Up...Your Façade (Mark 14:66-72)

3/21: Give Up...Your Expectations (Mark 15:1-15)

Lenten Supper Schedule

Wednesdays at 6:00 p.m.

(February 14—March 21)

School Gymnasium

Free-will offering

Holy Week Services

Maundy Thursday, March 29

12:00 Noon & 7:00 p.m.

Good Friday, March 30

12:00 Noon & 7:00 p.m.

Easter Sunday, April 1

Festival Services

8:00 & 10:45 a.m.

February 14, 2018 (*Ash Wednesday*)

Begin with God’s Word

Read: Genesis 3:1-19 (*If time is short, read verse 15*)

The Lord’s initial gift to Adam and eve was a perfect world and a perfect life, with beauty and peace surrounding them. Never did they expect that they would be challenged by evil. What was that? All was lovely and satisfying for both of them.

They did not expect or have any experiences with the evil that surrounded them with the approach of the devil. If we daily read our Bibles and keep God’s words in our lives and heart, He will give us the will and the strength to walk as His children.

The friends that we choose will affect our lives. If we find that we feel guilty of disobedience, take time out and go the Lord in prayer, asking Him to give you direction to forgive you. There is nothing He will not forgive.

God challenges each one of us to read and daily search the words He’s given us in His Book. The Bible wonderfully relates to us how He wants us to live out our lives.

God bless each one of us to seek out what He wills for us each day.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, we look to You for the strength to live our lives according to Your will each day that You give to us, Amen.*

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Virginia Marohn

February 15, 2018

Easter Sunday

April 1, 2018

Promises, Promises

Do Not Fear

Read: Genesis 12:1-3

Read: Mark 16:1-8 (If time is short, read verse 6)

The title of this devotion is a frequently used expression indicating the speaker is skeptical about someone’s stated intentions. Most of us started making promises at a young age. As children and teens, most of our promises were weakly made usually to try and get what we wanted or in return for some permission. As adults, the promises we make to family, friends and business associates carry far more weight. Maintaining relationships and preserving our reputation many times rests on whether those promises are kept. We all have people in our lives that faithfully keep their commitments and ones who we regularly have to say to ourselves “promises, promises”. We put our confidence and trust in those who regularly keep their promises and discount the word of those who don’t.

Vs. 6: “Don’t be alarmed,” he said, “you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has Risen! He is not here! See the place where they laid Him.”

One of the techniques we teachers have used in teaching Bible stories is putting yourself into the story. Who would you see yourself as in the narrative? When I read this familiar Resurrection text, I couldn't help but think of Mary Magdalene. Mary had suffered for years from demon possession, and even with her wealth was unable to find anyone to help her. This was until Jesus came into her life, forgave her sins and drove seven demons from her. She was so grateful to her loving Lord that she followed Jesus as He traveled and ministered to people, supporting him out of her own means. Mary was at the cross when Jesus died. The heartbreak of seeing her friend and master die must have been overwhelming. When the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, Mary was one of the two women who witnessed it. This knowledge caused worry as Mary, Salome, and Mary, the mother of James, set on their way that Sunday morning, bringing spices to anoint Jesus’ body. “Who will roll away the stone?” they questioned.

In these three Bible verses, God calls Abram to leave his entire life behind and move to an unknown land. God follows up this calling by making Abram seven wonderful promises. Can you imagine how hard it must have been for Abram to trust that God would keep those promises in return for Abram’s obedience to this vague request?

The young man (angel) said, “Don’t be afraid!” as the women saw no body but a man in white. (It has been said that “Do not fear”, or a derivative of the phrase is recorded 365 times in the Bible, a daily reminder for us. This is somewhat disputed as far as the number, but the importance of this directive is clear!) Assuring them that Jesus was not there because He had risen must have brought a mixture of fear but also great joy to Mary and her companions, as they ran to tell the disciples as directed! And we know what happened later when Jesus appeared to Mary when she mistook Him for the gardener. What a special reuniting! We also have been cured by Jesus of the insidious, damning condition of sin. His death on the cross set us free from the sins which separated us from God. We can feel the great joy of Mary Magdalene and the other followers who have seen the Risen Lord. We can look into the empty tomb and shout, “He is Risen”! I recently found Pastor Smith’s last sermon. Here is an excerpt from the ending. (From the third Sunday after Easter based on the story of the Emmaus disciples.)

As we head into the Lenten season, leading up to the Good Friday remembrance of the suffering and death of our Lord and Savior, let us always be mindful that God always keeps His promises. Through Jesus’ suffering and death, God kept the one promise that has the most important impact on us. By Him keeping the promise to send a Savior, we have the hope of salvation and eternal life.

Prayer: *Lord, help us to always have the strength of character to keep the promises we make to You and others, mirroring the example You set through Your words and deeds. Amen.*

Prayer: *"Though Heaven was and is His home, the risen Lord abides with us each moment of every day as our earthly guest through His living Word and His sacrament. He continues to do this so that we might be His guests eternally in heaven. We pray that our eyes might be opened to see and feel the presence of our Resurrected Lord today and always. Amen."*

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

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Tom D’Amico

Marnie Smith

Holy Saturday

March 31, 2018

Time for A Change

Read: Mark 15:42-47 *(If time is short, read verse 46)*

Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Sanhedrin who was himself looking forward to the kingdom of God went boldly to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus. Joseph, like Nicodemus were secret disciples of Jesus. Why did they remain in secret until Jesus’ death? They were afraid to let others know their allegiance to Jesus because of their position in society. How sad that it took Jesus’ death to bring about a change in their lives for the better.

Change...a small word that can strike fear in the hearts of men, and women. Change? Why do we have to change? We never did it that way before! What will people think? If I speak the truth someone might not like me or share my desire for The Truth. I could lose my friends, my family, my job. Yes, it is true. Some may not go with you but Jesus always will. If you ask Him, He will help you speak to all people through His Holy Spirit. We just need His courage and strength to ask and then to obey Him. We need to be Jesus hands and feet and reach out to others with the special gifts He has given to each one of us. Yes, even the gifts you do not feel comfortable in using yet. Let us encourage each other and welcome good change...a helping hand...a kind word...words to build up and not tear down. A smile, a hug...a card of thanks and in all things give thanks to God for it is in and through Him all good things come.

Prayer: *Lord God, Thank You for the many waves of change in our lives. Help us Lord to bend like willows in the wind as You call us to change. Open our hearts, minds, ears, arms, tongues, feet and hands and will to follow You as You lead us to be Your servants. I pray in Jesus Name!!! Amen!!!*

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Laurie Dorgan

February 16, 2018

God First!

Read: Genesis 22:1-18 *(If time is short, then begin with focusing on this verse)*

Vs. 8: Abraham answered, “God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering my son.” And the two of them went on together.

What an example of faith Abraham is for us! Out of the blue God speaks to him and says to take your son and sacrifice him. If that isn’t crazy enough, add to it that he needs to walk to Moriah which is about a 3 day journey. Then Isaac gets wise and starts to ask questions like, “The wood and the fire are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” The response that Abraham says is the perfect example for all of us when life’s situations seem impossible to understand. Abraham puts the trust where it belongs, in God’s Hands!

The past year included so many changes that I am still overwhelmed at times by the intensity of the blow. We had our oldest two children spread their wings and leave the nest. While going through these changes, there were many ups and downs. At some of those times all I could do is pray for the Lord to forgive me my worry and doubts, thank Him for being in charge, and trust the Lord to continue to have His diligent watch over our children as they begin their own households. I needed to let go and let God be God!

Now when things come up and uncertainty shows its face in our children’s lives, we tell them the same message that all of us need to hear. Remember that God is the one you need to trust, seek, and reach out to carry you through those difficult times. We all have those days, months, or even years when we feel that our situations are too hard to take or understand. We need to remember that Jesus is walking with us, holding us up in His Love, and most importantly that God is in charge and will provide what we need. He is the answer to all our questions. God indeed is first!

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, You truly do provide all that we need even though we do not deserve it. Thank You for walking with us daily. Thank You for showing us time and time again how much You love Your children. Forgive us our doubt and worries. Strengthen all those who are feeling overwhelmed today. Show us what we can do to help each other. In Jesus name. Amen.*

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Vicki Wykert

February 17, 2018

The Bigger Picture

Read: Genesis 50:15-21 (*If time is short, read verse 20*)

While being sold into slavery by ones' siblings would not be part of a "Good Day", I look at the story of Joseph being sold into slavery, from the perspective of the Egyptians. It was because of Joseph that Egypt was able to not only survive the famine, but prosper, due to its storehouses of food put away in advance. If Joseph had not be taken to Egypt as a slave, and had not been sold to Potiphar, what would have happened to the entire country of Egypt? I do not think it is a stretch to say the entire course of world history, as well as the history of the Jewish people, would have been set on a completely different trajectory, had Joseph not been sold into slavery.

Can God use evil for good? Of course! Throughout history, He has allowed horrific events to be a starting point for relationships, and developments of evangelism of His word. Many times, people's reaction to evil would not be nearly as intense, had they not had the experience firsthand. Those who have suffered abuse are often the most vocal, tireless workers to speak out against evil. Without facing that evil, they would not do the good they do to fight it. As an example, Candace Lightner's 13-year-old daughter, Cari, was killed by a drunk driver in 1980. That death caused the birth of MADD, Mother's Against Drunk Drivers, which has been fighting against drunk driving since that time. Cari's death may certainly have saved other lives.

It's a bit eerie to me, to read Verse 20, by itself: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is not being done, the saving of many lives". Words uttered by Joseph? Yes. Could they have been spoken by Jesus to those at the foot of the cross? YES! We thank God for His grace which allows even the worst of events to provide opportunities for blessings in life.

Prayer: Thank You, Jesus, for giving Your Life, to save the lives of many. We ask You to point us to ways in which we can show Your grace to others, and point them to You. Amen.

How will you respond to today's Word of Grace?

Jennifer Behnke

March 30, 2018

I Am Not Afraid

Read: Mark 15:33-39 (*If time is short, read verse 39*)

Your cancer is terminal. Those words are devastating. Bruce's best friend Mark heard these words late in the summer of 2010. Mark's response was "I am not afraid." Mark was not afraid because he knew that because Jesus had died for Him, Mark would be healed perfectly and be with Jesus in Heaven.

Jesus has experienced everything that we will ever experience. He was tired and thirsty. He was tempted by the devil, ridiculed by His enemies, and deserted by His friends. He experienced death. But His death on the cross was more awful than the deaths we will experience. At the ninth hour, He cried out with a loud voice, "My God, My God why have You forsaken Me?" (Mark 15:34) Note that Jesus cried out with a LOUD voice. A crucified man died of asphyxiation and was quiet at the end. Therefore Jesus' loud cry required an effort that an ordinary man cannot make. Jesus is more than human – He is also God. Verse 37 says that Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed His last. The Living Translation of 1 John 3:16 says we know what real love is because Jesus gave up His life for us. No one took His life from Him. He GAVE it up for us because He loves us so much.

No words of anger or criticism came out of Jesus' mouth during His time on the cross. His words were words of grace for the soldiers crucifying Him and words of caring for His mother and His beloved disciple. The centurion who stood facing Jesus during His crucifixion saw that this was no ordinary man. He confessed that this man is sure the Son of God.

Mark made this same confession. He was not afraid to die because He knew that Jesus lived and died for him. Now Mark is living in Heaven with our crucified and risen Savior.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, Thank You for forgiving my sins and promising to take me to Heaven. Because You lived and died for me, I am not afraid to die. In Your name I pray. Amen

How will you respond to today's Word of Grace?

Sherrie Smith

Maundy Thursday

March 29, 2018

Grace: Given Grace: Received

Read: Mark 14:22-25 *(If short on time, read verse 22 & 24)*

The Journey: Roads steep and very rutted through dense foliage. Climbing up a mountain side trying not to fall. Rough hewn benches under a makeshift canopy. Heat, no air conditioning (no walls), no organ or piano. Blue sky, gentle breezes and welcoming smiles by 20 fellow Christians who speak a foreign language. Sunday morning worship in Haiti June 2016.

The Grace Given/Received: Let’s think about GRACE as a verb. To honor or favor someone. Imagine it is time during the service we attended for Communion to be celebrated. During our Communion experience in Haiti, there was a shortage of the Host. However, our gracious brothers and sister in Christ insisted we fully partake in Communion. They showed us their bountiful grace by giving us their Host and doing without. We were all very moved by this gesture. The following Sunday when we were back at St. John’s the stark comparison of our two Communion experiences moved a few of us to tears. We are so blessed.

God’s Grace: We all know the familiar verses of Mark 14: 22 and 24 since we hear them spoken each time we are given the sacrament of Holy Communion. This is My body, this is My blood. Grace is the free and unmerited favor of God as manifest in salvation of us sinners through the suffering and death of our Savior Jesus. On this Maundy Thursday let us remember the meal Jesus shared with His disciples and shares with us because of God’s abundant grace for us.

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, Be with those who worship You on the mountain top in Haiti. We thank You for Your saving grace which You have given to us through Your Son Jesus. Through the Holy Spirit encourage us to share the knowledge of that grace with others. Amen.*

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Donna Preston

February 18, 2018

Seeing the Blood

Read: Exodus 12:1-13 *(If time is short, read verse 7 &13)*

Have you ever seen a pool of blood on the ground? How about a bowl of blood under a bleeding pig or cow that is hanging from the rafter of the butchering shed behind your house? It was just killed in preparation for butchering and carving into cuts that will be frozen for winter eating. I grew up on a farm, and this scene was a common sight each Fall as a no-longer-producing cow or pig was selected for slaughter to feed the family. It allowed us children to look forward to delicious meals throughout the winter.

If I had been a child in the Passover story found in Exodus 12, I would have been frightened. Think of it, my father had just been told to slaughter a lamb the right size for only one meal. A part of the directions had been to bleed out the lamb and to catch the blood in a basin. But the next directive is a bit mysterious. Put blood on the door of our house? And why in such a specific way?

Imagine in your mind’s eye...put the bowl of blood at the threshold of the door. Then find a branch from a bush. Dip the branch into the blood. Lift the branch up the center of the door, and at shoulder height, swish the branch from side to side, from the left doorpost across to the right doorpost. Then bring the branch back to the center and swish it up to touch the lintel across the top of the door. Did your mind’s eye catch the pattern made by the branch and the blood?

A CROSS!!

Our word of grace in verse 13 reads as follows, “When I (the Lord) see the blood, I will pass over you and no plague shall befall you or destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.” It was a cross that God saw when He passed over the houses of the Israelites! And it’s that same cross that God sees when He looks at you. He sees you through the eyes of the cross.

Prayer: *Dear God, Thank You for seeing me through the cross. Thank You for the plan of salvation You had put in place so many centuries before Jesus died for me. Thank You for loving me. Amen.*

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Shirley Morgenthaler

February 19, 2018

Music is a Glorious Gift from God!

Read: Exodus 15:1-18 *(If time is short, read verse 2)*

*“The Lord is my strength and my song.
He is my Savior.
This is my God and I will praise Him;
my father’s God and I will honor Him.”*

Exodus chapter 15:1-18 records the words of a beautiful song which Moses and the Israelites sang to the Lord after God rescued them from the terror and persecution of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. All the glory is given to the Lord.

Interestingly, I Corinthians 10:1-4 tells us to learn from what happened during this rescue. It says that the Israelites were all united with Moses by baptism in the cloud and in the sea; and that the spiritual rock from which they drank was Christ.

Hebrews 11 tells us, in verses 24-26, that Moses, who was raised with faith in the one true God, gave up his position as a son of Pharaoh's daughter because he thought that being insulted for Christ would be better than having the treasures of Egypt, and he looked forward to his reward. As we can see from these verses (and many others in the Old Testament) everything that happened was pointing to salvation by Christ. And even though the Israelites didn't know what God's future plan was, they were inspired to praise God with music and song. We should look at God that same way!

Exodus 15:2 states that God is "my father's God." Since my earthly father, Norman Ulrich, died two years ago, my relationship with my Heavenly Dad has grown even closer. I thank Him for the gift of music every single day! Music, first mentioned in Genesis 4:21, is a beautiful, calming, encouraging, inspiring, glorious gift from God. Whether we sing, play instruments, or simply listen to it, music is a marvelous way that we can connect with our Heavenly Father and His eternal, personal love for us.

The song recorded in Exodus 15 includes these wonderful words: "Lovingly, You will lead the people You have saved (redeemed). Powerfully, You will guide them to Your holy dwelling." What a wonderful promise this is to each of us, His children!

Prayer: *O Lord, thank You for being my Heavenly Dad, for loving me as Your child, and for filling my life with music!*

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Pamella Christensen

March 28, 2018

What is in a Name?

Read: Mark 14:10-11

Judas Iscariot. The mere mention of his name brings to mind shame, guilt and betrayal. Why would anyone betray Jesus? Judas was Jesus’ disciple. He was the accountant and stole from the treasury. It is easy to make Judas the bad guy. I wonder what made Judas turn from good to bad. If we go to that time, Rome had been oppressing the Jews and the disciples had hoped Jesus would bring His earthly Kingdom and overthrow them. When Jesus began prophesying of what He had to endure, the disciples were confused. Judas became angered. They gave all to follow Jesus. Jesus told them He would be leaving them and they felt abandoned. It seemed things were not turning out as they expected. Satan loves putting doubt in the hearts of men. Sadly, Judas decided to take matters in his own hands. But wait, what about the other disciples? Did they all not abandon Jesus when He was arrested, beaten and crucified? What of Peter who denied even knowing of Jesus three times?

Friend, are we all not guilty of the same? What do you do when things are not going as we expected?

We moan, cry, complain, doubt and try to make things work on our own. We place God in a small box, thinking He is too busy, or not hearing us. There have been times I have been beaten down so badly by Satan’s lies, I have doubted my faith...questioned my motives in tears, relived my sinful past...all the while Satan is laughing. We pray and expect things to work as we prayed but forget God does not think nor act like we do. We forget just how far God had to bend down to pick us up, love us and give us new life In His Son, Jesus Christ. Forgive us Father God.

Prayer: *Lord God, I cannot change the past but I can change the future with Jesus’ help. Help us return to You fully; daily giving You control. Humble us, as we ask for forgiveness and choose not to walk away but run into Your ever-forgiving open loving Arms. In Jesus Name I pray. Amen!*

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Laurie Dorgan

March 27, 2018

The Parable of the Tenants

Read: Matthew 21:33-46 *(If time is short, read verse 42)*

Being a tenant brings great responsibility. You must show integrity in doing a job to the best of your ability. We can apply parables to our lives. This parable the landowner put his trust in the tenants, they took advantage of his absence for their own greedy purpose by beating and killing the servants. They even killed the landowners son with the hope of collecting his inheritance.

Jesus reminds us that we to, can fall to greed and sin and teaches us that he will bring our sins to light so that we can see that we are broken and crushed, in need of forgiveness. We all have sinned and fallen short of Gods' will for our lives. Thankfully He gives grace when we come to the cross. King Jesus came to be because He knew we could not save ourselves. Jesus took the beating and died for us. He became the ransom for you and me.

I know how the servants felt. Twice my life has tried to be taken. Once it was saved by my blind and loyal dog and another was a Good Friday morning at the hands of my ex-husband. God gave me strength to keep my face out of the dishwater while my ex tried to drown me. Everyday I live in physical and emotional pain. But I put my trust in the Lord. He gives me strength to get up each day to serve Him with gladness.

I am grateful He loves us so much that He died to give us eternal life so that all fellow believers can live forever with Him. One day we will have to give an account to our Lord and my prayer is that He will say, "Well done, thy good and faithful servant."

Prayer: *Dear Lord, Please forgive us when we sin against You. Make us an instrument of Your peace. Amen.*

How will you respond to today's Word of Grace?

Joanie Kenning

February 20, 2018

Freed

Read: Exodus 20:1-17 *(If time is short, read verse 2)*

Just as God freed the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, He frees us from bondage to sin and self-centeredness. The Ten Commandments made it clear that God should be first in our life. God should be loved, obeyed, and honored. The rest of the commandments dealt with man's behavior towards his neighbor. By following these commandments man could live among each other.

Jesus summed up the Ten Commandments by stating "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your mind ". And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself ". How beautiful, by loving God and each other it becomes difficult to sin.

However without Jesus' atoning death on the cross for us we were lost in our sin and self-centeredness. We were not reconciled with God the Father. We were unable to love God or our neighbor. Being reconciled with the Trinity, due to Jesus' sacrifice, allows us to become spirit filled children of God. Spirit filled individuals now can love God and each other. With this God given grace it becomes difficult to sin. Freed from the power of sin we are freed from the power of death too! With this reconciliation to God my life has changed greatly. Jesus has become my first priority. I can feel the Holy Spirit sanctifying me daily. Such awesome grace, thank You Jesus for saving me!

Prayer: *Lord please open our hearts to You that we may become spirit filled and love You and each other.*

How will you respond to today's Word of Grace?

Paul Connor

February 21, 2018

Lights, Camera, Action!

Read: Leviticus 16:1-22 (*If time is short, read verse 22*)

We are reading the Bible from the beginning to end to our daughters at night. Being that they are ages 3 and 6, this poses some challenges reading the Old Testament. Our 6-year old wanted to have a party when we finished reading Leviticus! But they have had fun as well, because we act the reading out, use puppets, and talk about the main point of the chapter. One fun time was the time when we were reading about Balaam's donkey and we had to act this story out for a week straight! Of course, I had to be the donkey that they were beating, and the angel of the Lord was our 3-year old, who got to say "STOP!" to her sister, who was riding the "donkey" (me). Well, the Leviticus reading for today is quite detailed in how to perform sacrifices and how one makes atonement for himself and the people. However, no matter what we are reading we must remember that the whole Bible points to Jesus Christ, our Savior. This passage is a lovely depiction of Jesus, our scapegoat, being led to die, with our sins on His back; being cast out by the Father because He loves us so much! I can see us acting this one out now....I am sure I would be cast as the scapegoat! What a harsh, but beautiful picture of God's grace. Christians should all dramatize this story, and take turns putting several old soiled, heavy garments (sins) on someone who is role playing the scapegoat. Then we should take turns being the scapegoat, on which the soiled garments are placed. Maybe having done this, we may better reflect on the weight of our sin and the joy of being fully forgiven! With Jesus as our scapegoat, taking away all our sins, we are truly made as one with God, and our atonement is complete. What joy we can have in this knowledge during Lent!

Prayer: *Dearest Jesus, Thank You for being our scapegoat, taking away all our sins to make us completely at one with our Father, Creator, and Savior. Amen.*

How will you respond to today's Word of Grace?

Rebecca Hemminger

March 26, 2018

As Plain As Can Be

Read: John 2:13-22 (*If time is short, read verse 19*)

Most of the time when I read something, whether it be say an article of some type, a story, or even from the Bible, I usually try to figure out the author's hidden meaning. Sure, the words are there and they have their meaning by themselves. But what is the writer really trying to tell me? I am not sure how I developed this habit nor am I sure it is the best way to read for meaning. This is how I read these verses from John. I developed some anxiety while contemplating their meaning. I couldn't figure out the hidden meaning. This pushed me right up to the deadline. I finally figured out the problem though. There wasn't any hidden meaning in this passage. It is only to be taken at its face value, but it is such a bold statement that it can indeed stand all by itself.

Jesus was both human and divine. I believe He showed us the human side of Himself when He cleared His Father's temple of those desecrating it by trading and money changing. He did so by chasing them out with a whip of cords. His disciples remembered the prophecy that His passion or zeal for His Father's house would consume Him. After having done this, Christ was confronted by the Jewish leaders asking by what authority He had acted. This would be when He showed His divinity as His reply was, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." He is telling us that He is the Christ, that His life will be taken from Him, but in three days He will overcome death through His resurrection. This is the very anchor of grace as it can only be finished at Christ's Expense.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, May we offer continual thanks and praise for the grace You have shown us by sending Your only Son, Jesus, to us for the redemption of our sins. Amen.*

How will you respond to today's Word of Grace?

Cary Preston

Palm Sunday

March 25, 2018

Grace in the Midst of Praise

Read: Luke 19:28-40 *(If time is short, read verse 38)*

*Vs. 38: Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!*

We all know the story of Palm Sunday as Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey with the people shouting their praises of Hosanna. I have never thought of this story as a story of ‘God’s grace to us.’ However, take a look with me at what Jesus is doing here. Jesus knew, just like we do, what is coming later in the week. Yet, Jesus accepted their praise that day, knowing full well that in just a few days many of them would turn on Him and shout for Him to be crucified. This is grace!

Jesus shows us this same grace every time we acknowledge Him, every time we choose to follow Him, and every time we give Him praise. Just like those palm-waving Jews of old, we will quickly turn away from Him, betray Him and what He stands for, choose our own ways, discredit Him, give praise to ourselves, or ignore Him completely. Yet Jesus accepts our praise. This is grace!

Let us all humbly accept Jesus’ grace for us and share this grace with all those we meet throughout our days.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, We thank You for showing us grace as we praise You, knowing we will turn away from Your love. Be with us this week as we meditate on the love and grace You share with Your people throughout this Holy Week. Help us to make the time every day this week to reflect on the grace You give us through the cross. Amen!*

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Tom Wykert

February 22, 2018

To Live is Christ, To Die is Gain!

Read: Numbers 21:4-9 *(If time is short, read verse 9)*

“No more complaining in 2017!” was the banner we began with last January. Can you guess how long that lasted? Roughly one hour before someone in the Murphy home uttered the first grumble of the New Year. Although this continued to happen again and again, we also proceeded to remind each other of our pledge. Round and round we go...sin, repent, forgiveness and GRACE.

Our family, similar to the Israelites in today’s reading, repeatedly falls into bemoaning our lives and the things that draw us away from God. Daily we grieve our lack of time, money, and pleasure. And why can’t people just see it our way? All the time focusing on what is wrong, lacking and self-seeking. This is far more than a glass half full or empty attitude, this is failing to see GRACE in the world because our eyes are not fixed on Jesus.

The children of Israel had Moses as their advocate. In looking at the brazen snake God GRACEFULLY instructed Moses to fashion, they were granted healing and life. We call on Christ, because as John reminds us, “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so the Son of man must be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish.” What GRACE we have been shown! God brings about His purposes by contrary means! In looking at the serpent the people were restored by God’s GRACE in the shape of the very thing that wounded. We look to the wounded Christ who, in His perfection, was made in the likeness of our sinful flesh and sacrificed for our transgressions and our eternal healing. A GRACE shown to us that is undeserved. A GRACE we can celebrate along with Paul in proclaiming, “For to me to live is Christ, to die is gain.” A much more GRACE-filled banner than...no more complaining!

Prayer: *Great God, if I rise, let me rise on You, not on all my successes, my esteem or my pursuits. If I lose, let me lose my life because if I belong to Jesus the flesh is crucified. AMEN!*

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Katrina Murphy

February 23, 2018

What is that Falling Out of the Sky?

Read: Deuteronomy 8:1-10 (*If time is short, read verse 3*)

Vs. 3: He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

The Israelites found themselves in unfamiliar territory, and were not too happy about it. By this time, they had been travelling through the desert for several weeks. The land was different from their old, familiar surroundings, and they were hungry, too. They grumbled to Moses about their living conditions, the lack of food, and questioned why they had been brought all this way only to starve to death! God heard their complaints and sent manna (bread) to quell their hunger. It fell right out of the sky! They had never seen this type of food before. It was not exactly what they wanted, but it met their needs. God did this to teach them that He was faithful, that He loved them, and that He would supply all their needs, if they obeyed Him. He showed them grace even when they showed little trust in their God to care for them. He led them through the desert for forty years, teaching them to trust Him for their needs every step of the way.

Have you ever thought that **you** knew where you were supposed to be, only to find that **God** led you on an uncharted path that you didn't expect? We often fight any change, kicking and screaming all the way, eventually realizing that God knew what He was doing all the time! Several years back, I quit my job at a clinic when it was sold to a larger company. When the new owners had taken over, everything changed! It was no longer the place I was accustomed to, and I didn't like it. I didn't understand why all these changes had to take place, and I was grumbling. I wasn't trusting God, even though I knew that He was faithful and that He loved me. Over the next several years, God would use me to care for my Dad, my sister, and my Mom, instead of the patients that I had been caring for at the clinic. I could never have imagined that He would give me this *gift* in place of what I had expected. Why did I ever doubt him? After all, He gave us the most precious gift ever in his Son, Jesus. *"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."* (Phil. 4:19)

Prayer: Dear Lord, remind us daily to trust in You for all of our needs, to follow Your path for us, and to be thankful every day for the gift of Your Son, Jesus, the true Bread of Heaven. Amen.

How will you respond to today's Word of Grace?

Nancy Mayor

March 24, 2018

Open Your Eyes!

Read: Revelation 21:1-8 (*If short on time, read verse 6*)

2017...what a year...the good, the bad and the ugly...My oldest daughter moved out on her own, my mom's Alzheimer's was progressing, the unsteadiness at work not knowing whom I would be working for next, the decision to work another job to help lower our debt, allowing myself to fall back into bad habits and gain 35+ pounds, I was in self destruction mode—BIG TIME. I could not see the "good" in 2017, I just simply wouldn't allow myself to see it. I was fine in my whole of self-pity. "Good" simply couldn't exist.

I became blind, I became unaware that God was dwelling with me, wiping away every tear from my eye. I became blind to His grace.

It was around Christmas time, I was cleaning the pews in church, and for some reason I just stopped, stopped and listened and stared at the cross...and cried. How could I not hear Him calling me? How could I allow myself to lose all faith? It was then I allowed God's grace to fill my soul...Revelation 21:5 *"And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.'" Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

With God's grace, death and resurrection of His son, Jesus Christ, I was forgiven and made new in that moment, I was brought to see His love. Revelation 21:6, *And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment."*

My days are new and with God's grace, I am no longer blind to the "good" in my life. As we feel the end is near, we must turn to the cross and ask for forgiveness and God's never-ending grace.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, when we feel the weight of this life, let us remember to be still and listen. Let us allow Your mercy and grace to fill our trouble hearts and bring us peace and make us new again.

How will you respond to today's Word of Grace?

Michelle La Velle

March 23, 2018

Smile

Read: 1 John 3:11-18 *(If time is short, read verse 16)*

I'll never forget the first time my husband smiled at me – I had just started working at a new place in a new city. I met him at the front desk soon after my lunch break. When he smiled at me, his whole face lit up. I was going through a tough time, and his smile really warmed my heart. Little did I know what God had planned down the road for us.....

The verses today talk about loving with our truth and with our deeds. Talk can be cheap, so the saying goes. We say things, but do we really mean them and do we act on them? Jesus, however, is the ultimate example of true love and love through action. He spoke of love, and then showed that love. His most beautiful and powerful demonstration of His love was at the cross. He suffered and died for all of our sins on that cross and then rose again on the third day. He truly “laid down His life for us.” Most of us do not have the opportunity to lay down our lives for others, but we do have the opportunity to be kind and loving. We get so busy with our commitments, our phones, and our thoughts that we just brush by other people without even looking at them. Eye contact and a smile can do so much in this world to show the love of Jesus.

I pray when you see the opportunity to act in love that you will take it. Whether it's the homeless man riding his bike down your street, the barista at your favorite coffee house serving up your morning brew, or the grumpy co-worker in the next cubicle – I invite you to show the love of Jesus through you. It doesn't have to be a grand gesture, maybe just a smile...

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank You for being eternally kind and loving to me. Father, help me to show Your love and grace to those I encounter each day. In Your name I pray, Amen.

How will you respond to today's Word of Grace?

Melissa Roberts

February 24, 2018

An Ear Tuned for Service

Read: Joshua 24:14-28 *(If short on time, read verse 15)*

I often remember a little plaque hung by my grandparents' door. It was simply a quote from Joshua, “But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”. My Grandpa told me it was one of his favorite verses because when he left the house, it reminded him of what to always do at home or away.

Serving in some way, was something he always seemed to be doing. Grandpa Behnke was a piano tuner and NO piano at Grace Lutheran Church or School in Chicago was ever out of tune. It was one of the things he could do, along with many other things not as easily noticed. If a door squeaked he oiled it, if a lightbulb burned out he replaced it. His retirement was as busy as most of our working lives.

We all have ways and gifts with which we can serve our church and each other. We, as a household of faith, should always be listening for ways to serve, whether in our congregation, our community and our world.

In the world, service is not always given to the Glory of God. Christians should gladly help all those around us, in every way we can, to reflect God's Grace to us.

Joshua reminded the people of Israel in this passage to serve the one true God. We should always believe his message to them, and to us, that what we have is given to us by God's grace.

Forgiveness has been freely given to us through the gift of Jesus Christ and so we should reflect our faith to the world around us by service.

Grandpa had his tools and an ear to tune a piano. We all have ears to hear the needs of each other and God's church. Let us all serve the Lord with gladness.

Prayer: Lord, by Your grace, You gave Your only Son to save us from our sins and the power of the devil. May we serve You always as we hear the call to build Your kingdom and be an example reflecting Your grace to us to all around us. In Jesus name, Amen.

How will you respond to today's Word of Grace?

Mark Behnke

February 25, 2018

Almighty God, Please Give Me the Strength!

Read: Judges 16:23-31 (*If short on time, read verse 28*)

Do you know the story of Samson?

His story, written in Judges Chapters 13 through 17, is interesting, amazing, and filled with examples of God's love and care for sinful people whom He created. I greatly encourage you to read these 5 chapters!

First a "Messenger of the Lord" appeared to a barren wife and promised that she would become pregnant with a son! God's Messenger also told her exactly how to raise him. When the baby was born, his mother named him Samson, and the Lord blessed him.

As Samson grew up, he was incredibly muscular and strong. He was also sinful. But the Lord continued to bless him and use him. Samson served as a judge over Israel for 20 years.

But throughout Samson's life his strength often led him to sin. Eventually he experienced punishment from God. He was captured by the Philistines, who poked out his eyes, took him to prison, tied him up with double chains and forced him to work as a grain grinder.

While he experienced this punishment, Samson also began to grow again in faith. He called out to God, "Almighty Lord, please remember me! God, give me strength just one more time!" And God responded by perhaps giving Samson more strength than anyone else on earth has ever had! The strength caused the death of thousands of God-rejecting Philistines. Samson died, too—and entered eternity with the Lord.

We are sinners, too. So we can be encouraged by Samson's unique story. God planned each of our lives; He loves us; and He is always ready to help us and to forgive our sins when we turn to Him!

Prayer: *Dear Lord, Thank You for creating me and loving me. And thank You for forgiving my sins! Help me to grow in my faith every day. Amen.*

How will you respond to today's Word of Grace?

Pamella Christensen

March 22, 2018

We Belong to God

Read: 1 Peter 2:1-10 (*If time is short, read verse 9*)

I have six children, ten grandchildren, (and one great grandson who will be here by the time this devotion is being read). As infants, they all craved the milk that helped them grow. As they grew, I watched them go through hardships and times of rejection. I watched when they were looking for acceptance, often in the wrong places. I was able to relate to how they felt as I had gone through similar difficulties when I was young. My heart broke for them many times and I didn't always have the right words of encouragement for them. If I had known then what I know now, I may have been more help. I am going to share something that I want them to know about me in case they aren't sure. I think it's part of what Peter was saying in these verses when he was trying to encourage believers.

"Christ is the foundation for my life. He is my Rock. I trust in Him completely and He will never let me down." I will admit that I am still a sinner but I am doing my best to avoid the evil tools the devil uses as he tries to trick me into believing I am worthless. And I will continue to feed on God's Word so I can grow spiritually. I pray that all of you will also follow Peter's advise to be strong in your faith."

As believers we are set apart. We are all God's chosen people. We are here to praise Him and to show others the way. We belong.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, Thank You for Your wonderful mercy which brought us out of the darkness and into Your marvelous light. Please help us to crave Your Word so we can continue to grow in faith. Remind us we are Yours and prevent us from stumbling. Please let us stand out in a way that will lead others to You. Bless our families and lead the ones that have wandered away from You back to where they belong. In Jesus name. Amen.*

How will you respond to today's Word of Grace?

Margaret Turner

March 21, 2018

EVERY Good and Perfect Gift?

Read: James 1:12-18 *(If time is short, read verse 17)*

Last spring, on a Saturday morning after going to Aldi, I was driving our newish Volkswagen east on 47th Street. I noticed the road was very bumpy and attributed it to the heavy truck traffic associated with the quarry. But it seemed to get progressively bumpier as I drove. I pulled into an empty parking lot to see if there was something wrong with my car. As I did, the car seemed to drop. I got out and saw no wheel on the front left side. Huh? With that, a young man approached rolling a wheel and said, “I think you lost this.” Huh? He’d been working on a car in the back of the lot and my wheel came directly toward him. All five bolts had fallen off in a pile and my wheel went rolling off. Huh? The car drove fine on the way to the grocery store, so had it been tampered with while I was shopping? Maybe.

All I know is that this weird situation could easily have been deadly. I could have been on LaGrange Rd with no place to pull over. I could have been on 294 driving at high speeds. There could have been no one in the lot to help me get that wheel back on. Instead, it happened on 47th Street which had little traffic, there was a lot to pull into, the wheel fell off in the lot, and Jerome (who I’m convinced was an angel placed there by God) was working on another car at that moment.

My experience that April morning was a gift from God. I was assuredly reminded that He is in charge and He showed me His grace by protecting me. God is good-all the time.

Prayer: *Gracious God, thank You for the many blessings with which we are showered every day. Give us grateful hearts for every situation.*

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Sue Kunz

February 26, 2018

Trusting God

Read: Ruth 1:1-18 *(If short on time, read verse 16)*

One of my favorite books of the Old Testament is the book of Ruth. It is not only because verse 16 was sung at my wedding, but more importantly because it is a story of commitment, trust, and God’s gracious care and protection—and redemption!

Ruth’s mother-in-law had lost not only her husband but also her two sons in the land of Moab. Deciding to return to her own people in Judea, she implores her two daughters-in-law to return to the country of Moab so that they can remarry and have a good and secure life again. Orpah decides to take Naomi’s advise and return to Moab, but Ruth is determined to stay with Naomi, no matter the consequence. She says to Naomi, “Where you go, I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God...” (vs 16)

Stop and really think about what Ruth committed to do! She not only made a remarkable pledge to Naomi, but she trusted her future to Naomi’s God, no matter what would happen. She did so at her own personal risk, realizing that she was subjecting herself to danger as a single woman, and a life of hard work with no prospect of remarrying and in a land that was totally foreign to her. But the message here is not about how strong and courageous Ruth really was, but how faithful the God that she trusted in really IS, and how He blessed her for her commitment to trust and honor Him no matter the outcome!

Not knowing at all what the future held for them, she went to work gathering sheaves in the field of Boaz, who hearing of what she had done for Naomi, made sure she was safe and able to glean all the grain she needed. She eventually married Boaz (Chapters 2 – 4 are a great read!) and bore him a son named Obed, who became a forerunner of Jesus. God directed a wonderful outcome—not only for her ultimate welfare—but for ours as well!

Today we have the benefit of looking back and seeing God’s plan of Salvation, whereas Ruth did not! Since Jesus secured our future on the cross of Calvary, can we not trust the outcome of the details of our lives to Him??

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for the example of Ruth and how You blessed her. Forgive us for any lack of dependence on You. Help us to trust You in all things by placing every aspect of our lives under Your divine care and guidance. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Chris Kirchenberg

February 27, 2018

A Beautiful Heart

Read: 1 Samuel 16:1-13 (If short on time, read verse 7)

Vs. 7: But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

Our Bible tells us in Chapter 15 that Saul had been rejected by God as the king of Israel due to his disobedience. Saul begged Samuel to stay with him. As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught the hem of his robe and it tore. Samuel said to him, “the Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you and given it to one of your neighbors—to one better than you.”

Chapter 16 begins with the Lord telling Samuel that he must move on and no longer mourn for Saul. God had chosen one of Jesse’s sons in Bethlehem to be king. When Samuel arrived he consecrated Jesse and his sons with a special sacrifice to the Lord. Jesse’s first son was presented and he appeared quite impressive to Samuel. Surely this must be the one! All the other brothers were set before Samuel and they were rejected as well. Then the youngest David is called in from a field where he was tending sheep—just a lowly shepherd boy! The Lord told Samuel “He is the one!” All the other brothers’ appearance of stature and strength was not what the Lord was looking for—it was the heart!

My sister and I really enjoy a particular county fair in Wisconsin over Labor Day weekend. Besides cruising the food vendors of course, we love to go through all the livestock barns and see all the animals; cows, goats, pigs and of course the sheep! These animals are shown and sold as 4H projects by older children and teenagers in the farming community. It’s amazing to watch these young people covered in dirt, sweat and straw tend to their beloved animals. I believe David shared that love. This is how David was chosen—he had a beautiful heart ready for God’s service! In this humble soul was a young man destined for greatness led by the Holy Spirit God lovingly placed in his heart.

I think it was my grandmother who used to say “beauty is only skin deep” - probably in response to agonizing over my awkward adolescence! Perhaps we always need to remember that God looks deep within each of us to the heart. It is there where He stokes the fire of the Holy Spirit and fills us with a love to be in His service!

Prayer: Lord help us to always look for the beauty in the heart of all we meet and minister to and not judge outward appearances. Help us to love and serve You by the power of the Holy spirit. Amen!

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Barb Pearson

March 20, 2018

Walked in Our Shoes

Read: Hebrews 4:14-16

Early in my career, my company had an “exchange” program where a member of our centralized field logistics team would go into the field and learn the job of someone in one of our field support offices. At the same time a field support person would be sent to our worldwide parts distribution center to learn the various job functions that occur there. I had the opportunity to go to southern California for two weeks (lucky me) and learn the various job functions of a couple of individuals in a regional parts warehouse and a field engineering office. It was a great experience I will never forget and it helped those fortunate enough to participate to understand more fully the challenges of the other person’s job and how each employee’s actions can affect the other.

In our passage for today, the author states “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses...” Jesus was very human and experienced the same feelings we feel every day. The passage goes on to say, “...we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.” Ahhh, there is the difference. He is also God, yet because He was human we have a God who is very connected to us and understands our daily struggles with life, our imperfections, our daily need for His mercy and grace. He wants us, He encourages us to “approach the throne of grace”, to seek Him out, to talk to Him daily in prayer, to stay connected to Him in every way so that He may lavish His grace upon us.

Prayer: Dear Lord, You know our frailties, vulnerabilities, temptations and our sorrows. Yet You are a sinless God. Thank You for the grace You provide us each day through Your forgiveness of sins. Help us to live lives knowing we have the comfort of a Savior who understands. Amen.

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Rick Lange

March 19, 2018

I Had Nothing to Do with It

Read: Titus 3:1-17 *(If time is short, read verse 5)*

I grew up in a Christian family and went to Lutheran schools from Kindergarten through graduate school. You could say I am a product of the system. I knew I wanted to be a Lutheran teacher since I first walked into my Kindergarten classroom at Peace Lutheran School in Chicago in 1955. I grew up knowing I am saved because I am a baptized child of God who sent His son Jesus to die on the cross for my sins. It seemed simple to me then, and it seems simple to me now. I had nothing to do with my salvation. God, through the work of Christ, did everything. Because I am saved, I am free to live a life of worship and praise to God through my vocation and life. For forty-four years that vocation was teaching in Lutheran schools, but we are all called to live a life of service to God through whatever vocation we have. Luther taught that the life of every Christian was that of serving God through serving his neighbor while we are here on earth. I am not teaching anymore, but I still serve God through my interactions with others and how I use my time and talents.

The reading from Titus tells us we are saved "not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved is through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." This means we were saved at our baptism. As our faith is fed regularly through the word of God and holy communion, we are free to live the grace-filled, sanctified life. With whom can you share this grace today?

Prayer: *Dear God, thank You for loving me so much that You would send Your son Jesus to die for me. Use me to further the spread of your kingdom. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Lynn Kahl

February 28, 2018

We Must Confess Our Sins

Read: 2 Samuel 12:1-13 *(If time is short, read verse 13)*

Vs. 13: "Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' "

You have undoubtedly read or heard the story of David. He was raised as a shepherd; he killed Goliath the giant; and he became the rich and wonderful King of Israel. The Bible tells us, in 2 Samuel 8:14, that "everywhere David went, the Lord gave him victories."

But as David grew more powerful as the king, he began to put his focus on his own desires and accomplishments, rather than seeking God's guidance and wisdom. God responded with anger and punishment, asking David, through the prophet Nathan, "Why did you despise My Word by doing what I considered evil?" (2 Samuel 12:9)

David responded with guilt and shame, "I have sinned against the Lord." (verse 13)

Have you ever become so involved with an area of your life that you have left God out of your focus and decisions? It is very easy to do! When we fail to pray and ask God for His guidance every day, we, too, as did David, fall into sin.

Thankfully, when we realize our sins and confess them to God, He does forgive us. Nathan told David, "The Lord has taken away your sin" (verse 13). What a blessing for David—and for each of us! This is why Jesus died on the cross. He paid for our sins! We may still endure punishment, just as David did. But when we confess our sins, our relationship with our Heavenly Father is restored!

Prayer: *Dear Lord, I confess that I am sinful. Help me to keep my daily focus more on You and Your guidance. Thank You for loving me, and thank You so much for forgiving me! In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Pamella Christensen

March 1, 2018

Seeking Wisdom from God

Read: 1 Kings 3:16-28 (*If time is short, read verse 28*)

Two women came before King Solomon in this passage, asking for his judgment in a highly contentious and emotional dispute. The future of a child was at risk – each declared she was the mother of the baby and asked the king to decide in her favor. The wrong decision would clearly be disastrous for the mother and her child. When Solomon asked for a sword and proposed to give half of the baby to each woman, he knew that the mother would plead for the child's life, even if this meant losing her baby to the other woman. The mother responded just as Solomon had reasoned, and all of Israel praised him for his great wisdom.

Solomon was not a self-important ruler. He humbly asked God for wisdom, desiring to honor God as Israel's king, and God granted his request. These verses show us a wonderful example of God's provision of wisdom for His people, of His promise to guide His children as an all-knowing Father. James reinforces this promise in his Epistle (James 1:5): *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him."* God reveals Himself to us in His Word, and as we learn more of Him, He imparts the wisdom that only He can give. Wisdom from God will engender humility, generosity, and commitment to what is right, and as we strive to exemplify these qualities in our daily lives, wisdom becomes a guiding force in strengthening our faith. When God graciously favors us with His wisdom, He draws us close to Himself so that we can live with confidence and joy as His redeemed children.

Prayer: *Father, We ask You for true wisdom and for a deeper understanding of Your Word. Give us a hunger for the knowledge You promise Your children and help us to exercise this wisdom in our daily lives. We pray for spiritual insight which only You can give and ask for Your Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts, our actions, and our conversations each day. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

How will you respond to today's Word of Grace?

Dalyne Shinneman

March 18, 2018

Finish the Race

Read: 2 Timothy 4:6-8

As I read through the long list of Bible verses available for Lenten devotions this year, nothing was really speaking to me to help determine my choice. It wasn't until I came across this passage, after reading through 32 others, that I knew. 2 Timothy 4:7 was the verse that rose to the top for Pastor Haberkost when preparing for my Dad's funeral, and it was a verse my Dad had spoken of in his last weeks here on Earth. For this reason, it has become a special verse for me, and so I write this devotion.

In Paul's last letter to Timothy, he knows that the end of his life is near as he sits chained in prison. This whole letter encourages Timothy to proclaim the message of God's grace. They have now seen for themselves the death and resurrection of Christ, which had been foretold. Paul wants to be sure that Timothy claims the inheritance of God's grace for himself, *and* proclaims this Gospel of God's grace to those around him.

When my Dad spoke of 2 Timothy 4:7, he knew that the end of his life was near. He wasn't in prison, but cancer had confined him to his bed. My Dad wanted us to know that he was sure of his salvation. He brought my brother and me up in a Christian home so that we would be assured of our salvation. By God's grace, I know my Dad is rejoicing in Heaven. By God's grace, we will *all* rejoice together someday.

Luther called what happened on the cross "the joyous exchange." Life is restored to sinful humans, only because God has exchanged our sinfulness for Christ's righteousness. While grief has become a part of my everyday life, I thank God that my Dad's suffering has ended. I know that my Dad looks *awesome* wearing that crown of righteousness!

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, help us to run, with patience, the race that You have set before us. Keep us mindful of the need to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus. Teach us all to walk in a godly way, to Your praise and glory. Amen.*

How will you respond to today's Word of Grace?

Teri Lyn Mannes

March 17, 2018

An Abundance of Grace

Read: 1 Timothy 1:12-17 (If short on time, read verse 15)

Vs. 15: “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.”

When I was teaching full-time, I used to talk to my students about making good choices. I also told them that ALL choices have consequences. Good choices, like completing homework and studying for tests, have positive consequences. Poor choices, like saying unkind things and being a bully, have negative consequences. When I think of my own life, boy have I made some extremely poor choices! It has been through God’s unquestionable and abundant grace that I have survived some of those poor choices. I have been through some very difficult struggles in my adult life, emotionally, professionally, and especially spiritually. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that if I didn’t have God in my life, I would be lost.

I think Paul was, letter to Timothy, being a mentor and teacher to him, was giving him advice and encouragement, as teachers often do. In doing so, Timothy could lead his church to accepting and living in knowledge of Christ Jesus and live in His abundant grace. I particularly love verse 14 that says, “The grace of our Lord was poured out on my **abundantly**, along with faith and love that are in Christ Jesus,”

We have such hope in God’s promises and can find such comfort in the fact that Jesus came into the world for ALL, even though we are sinners! Even with the poor choices we make at times, JESUS is the same today, tomorrow and forever. He will NEVER stop loving us, caring for us hoping for us! He SAVED us! And gives us His abundant grace every. single. day. Wow! That sure feels good, even during the most difficult times!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us the grace we do not deserve but receive through our Savior, Jesus. Amen.

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Karen Ciango

March 2, 2018

Anticipation

Read: Nehemiah 8:1-8 (If time is short, read verse 8)

Vs. 8: They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.”

Do you remember the commercial a few years back that Heinz ketchup enlisted to encourage all the impatient ketchup lovers with their thick, slow moving ketchup? Carly Simon sang the track in the background, “Anticipation”, while the viewers watched the Heinz ketchup slowly roll out of the bottle before the hungry diner could dive into his hot dog, hamburger, or French fries?

Imagine the next scenario...

Ezra, the priest, had been busy teaching the Law to God’s people away from large gatherings for thirteen years. In the New Year, 445 BC, the people had publically assembled at the New Gate square to hear Ezra read the Book of the Law of Moses to them. There was quite a build up to the event. Anticipation...Ezra was standing on a platform; he was surrounded by Nehemiah (the governor) and Levities, who instructed the people. The assembly of people realized the gravity of the moment, and stood respectfully as Ezra opened the Book of the Law. They responded to God’s words with “Amen! Amen!” and bowed down and worshipped Him. Did I mention, they most likely stood for five to six hours, with fixed attention to what was being read? They were convicted by the Law, yet continuously stood to worship. Nehemiah went on to encourage them, “the joy of the Lord is your strength.” Their worship experience that day would be a daily reminder of what they experienced...the anticipation...that one day in heaven...with our Lord and Savior, and the whole company of heaven...together...the wait would be rewarded.

Prayer: Thank You, God, for giving us Your Word, to sustain us, convict us, and forgive us. May I look forward to hearing and reading Your Word with anticipation and gladness.

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace? The Law rightly convicts us. Thanks be to God, who gives us forgiveness, life, and salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Julie Strasser

March 3, 2018

God is Always There

Read: Job 19:23-27 (If short on time, read verse 25)

Could you read the first six words of verse 25 and not sing them?

Little did Job know the words he wished recorded or engraved on a rock forever would be recorded in Handel’s Messiah and continues to be sung today.

So here’s the section paralleling Job’s testing and trials and my own. WRONG!! I can’t begin to fathom what Job went thru.

What I can share with him is my faith in God.

Every time I sign-up to do a devotion I question my sanity. I am not a writer—can’t put into words what I feel. This year was no exception.

I wrote and rewrote but couldn’t find words. So again I asked God to help me find the right words. Now it’s getting closer to the due date and I’m still stuck. When I try to think, I am plagued with an ear worm—the music going around and around in my head. No words come, my prayer for guidance doesn’t work and I sit stewing because of the distraction of the ear worm. You have probably caught on to what took me days to figure out. The music was something we had been practicing in choir. When I listened to the words, I realized they said exactly what I was trying to write.

Here are some of the words from the song. Hopefully you, too, will feel the enthusiasm, comfort and joy.

“Keep God’s light before you; Keep God’s trust beside you;
Keep God’s hope to guide you everywhere you go.
Keep God’s peace within you; Feel God’s strength defend you:
Let God’s love begin to fill your thirsty soul.
Hold on in times of sorrow; hold on through days of despair;
Even in the darkest valley God will always be there.”

God is always there for us. He promised a redeemer and I can say along with Job “I know that my Redeemer lives.”

He lives to silence all my fears: He lives to wipe away my tears.
He lives to calm my troubled heart: He lives all blessings to impart. Amen. (LSB pg. 461, vs.5)

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Sharon Broz

March 16, 2018

Thank God for Trials. What?

Read: 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 (If short on time, read verse 13)

In this passage, I’m encouraged to continually give thanks to God for revealing to me through personal trials, my absolute essential need for salvation. This salvation can only come through the life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. God’s grace continues to use the Word to work in our lives by giving us the desire and the power to imitate Jesus. Satan’s desire is to draw us back into our sins, so as to make the spreading of the Gospel ineffectual.

Trials resulting as a consequence of our own sins should make us repent. Trials resulting from no apparent fault of our own, may be evidence of God’s effectiveness of spreading the Gospel through us. Our response in either case must be dependence on God’s perfect will and ample power to have victory. We will have hope only if we strive, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to wholly depend on God for deliverance. We do this through prayer and study of His reliable Word. Time and time again, the Bible testifies to God delivering sinners through trials.

Acts 5:41 makes me feel inadequate, yet inspired. The apostles were tried by the Sanhedrin and then flogged for proclaiming the Gospel. Yet they were able to rejoice for being counted worthy of suffering for the Name above all names of Jesus.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Deliver me from the delusion that I can handle things without You. Develop in me the desire and the means to pray ever more fervently, and to study Your Word ever more habitually. Remind me constantly how awesome it is that You sent Your perfect Son to die, so that I, a sinner, can be saved. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Pete Johnson

March 15, 2018

Judgement Free Zone

Read: Colossians 2:16-23 (If short on time, read verse 17)

In this passage, we are reminded of what it means to be Christians. We are not saved by adhering to a list of rules or by having special knowledge, but by understanding that Christ died for us and our sins. We are saved through His grace. However, this does not give us permission to judge others. We are all sinners. We cannot judge others for their sins, when we have not obeyed God in our own lives. We are all guilty of casting judgement on others, but this does not exemplify God’s grace. God does not judge us for our sin. He calls us back to Him and offers us forgiveness. In recognition of this, we should live in a way that is pleasing to God, and is an example of His grace and love. As Christians, we know that all we need is found in God, our Father. This puts the focus of our lives on God and encourages us to live in a way that is pleasing to Him.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for the gift of Your grace. We pray that You keep us focused on You this Lenten season. Keep us from judging others, and becoming distracted by the world around us. Remind us of our responsibility as Christians and disciples of Your Word. Help us to love one another, as You love us. In Your heavenly name we pray, Amen.

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Erin Shinneman

March 4, 2018

In God’s Time

Read: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (If time is short, read verse 1)

Vs. 1: There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.

This verse rings so true for me. I have experienced many things under heaven to which my feelings about them give me away. I am a sinner with little faith. Though I confess that the good Lord is my GOD, my feelings about my difficult circumstances show a lack of trust in Him.

For example, the sudden death of my mother made me bitter and angry for a number of years. However, seasons came and seasons went, the time to mourn turned to a time to dance. I received His blessings in so many ways such as getting married, having 2 wonderful children and a secure job.

Tragedy struck again. This time it was the death of my 17 year old son. There was no controlling the cancer. I had to let go and let God. I often was consumed by my feelings of sadness and anger. Though we try to control and understand all the tragedies in our world, all the worrying will not change a thing. It can only make us stressed out and sick! We must learn to trust God. As Solomon wrote, so much of what we try to do becomes meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Again, I can now see the miracles and blessings that He gives. I may not understand why things happened as they do, but I now know that He is on my side and is taking care of me. I trust in Him. These verses ring true for all of us.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, May we always remember to bring our requests to You in prayer, knowing that You will answer them in YOUR time. Amen

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Jessica Connor

March 5, 2018

Trading Up

Read: Isaiah 52:13-53:12 (*If time is short, read verse 10*)

Recently, something happened at my job, and I was disciplined in what I felt was an unjust manner. I was furious, and justified my anger by thinking of reasons this was unfair. Eventually, however, I realized that behavior has consequences, and my being disciplined was related to my behavior. I also realized that there were not always negative consequences for imperfect behaviors which only serve to promote continued similar action.

In Isaiah, Jesus, the suffering servant, is described as being so disfigured that He appears less than human and despised and rejected. The man of sorrows carried OUR sin without defending Himself for the injustice; the sinless God-Man suffered for the sin of everyone else.

Our laws point to retribution based on justice, “an eye for an eye.” That’s the Law, but the Gospel is different. There, God reaches out to sinners and draws us to Jesus, whose perfect life and sacrificial death meet the Law’s requirements for the expiation of our sin. That sin has contaminated God’s good creation, and the disfigurement Jesus bore reflects our disfigurement apart from God. Jesus took that upon Himself, as well as its consequences required by a just God, and He gave us His perfection in exchange. When the Father looks at us, He doesn’t see our flaws, He sees Jesus.

This is grace: God’s willingness to forgive our sin out of love. His Law demands compensation for the breach sin causes, and His sinless son lovingly pays that debt. Make sense? Not to the natural mind, but when we put on the mind of Christ it does.

Prayer: *Lord, we’re outraged when people treat us unfairly, yet Your holy Son redeemed our sinfulness, looked at us and said, “You’re worth it.” This is Your grace. This is how You relate to us even when we mess up in our work, our relationships or in the very fabric of our lives. Help us to remember Your “amazing grace,” and to respond to You in awe and gratitude for Your love.*

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Chris Hubacek

March 14, 2018

Pounding Nails into Jesus’ Hands

Read: Philippians 2:1-11 (*If short on time, read verse 3*)

God often speaks loudly to me as I prepare the lesson for my Sunday School students. As I prepared for this lesson, the plan was to write sins on a piece of paper and then pin these sins to beanbags. I used red beanbags for the obvious reason – Jesus’ blood shed for us was red. I choose sins that I thought the Sunday School students could relate to. Shockingly, I could relate to them as well. I was unprepared for my reaction as I pinned those sins to those beanbags. God showed me that those very sins were the ones that nailed Jesus’ hands to the cross. As I stuck those pins in the beanbags, I realized that I was pounding nails into Jesus’ hands.

If that were the end of the story, devastation would be the result. Here is how the activity worked in class. I taped a heart outline on the floor and placed those beanbags – with the sins—inside the heart. One by one, the students picked up a beanbag and read the sin. The entire class said, “Jesus forgives you”. Then the students placed their beanbags in a basket. When the last student had placed the last beanbag inside the basket, the heart was empty. All of the sins were forgiven – the heart was cleansed.

Philippians 2:8 says that Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient even to death on a cross. Jesus saw our need for forgiveness and considered that before He considered His own life. His hands were nailed to the cross because of our sins. Because Jesus is Lord, death could not keep Him in the grave. He rose and we are forgiven. Our hearts are cleansed. Our knees bow before Him because He has given us eternal life with Him.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, I am sorry for my sins that nailed Your hands to the cross. I am forever grateful for Your grace that forgave those sins and cleansed my heart. I bow my knees before You. In Your name I pray. Amen.*

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Sherrie Smith

March 13, 2018

It’s All Him

Read: Ephesians 2:1-10 (If short on time, read verse 5)

Being successful has always been a huge deal to me. Every grade, every performance, every little detail must be perfect. I would always beat myself up on the little things. One time, I studied pretty hard for a test and only got a 96% when I had been expecting, and wanting, a perfect 100%. No one had pressured me into this or forced me to strive for one hundreds and A's and perfection. Yet, time after time I wasn't satisfied with perfection.

Our world advertises and commercializes perfection, from the Photoshopped models in magazines, to the constant new diets and foods on the market. The world is saying, "Change, change, change. Be better, be more, be perfect." We spend our whole lives trying to reach that bar of perfection, never realizing that the bar is constantly moving upward, just always out of reach.

But God doesn't expect that level of perfection. He knows we are all dirty and unclean because of our sins. Our word of grace states that we were "dead because of our sins" but God sent His son Jesus, who cleaned us of those sins. All we have to do is believe.

It's common that babies are baptized. This shows that God is doing the work of belief and forgiveness and drowning of sin, not the baby. You don't have to do anything expect realize that God makes you believe, believe in His love and mercy and trust He'll make you clean, because He will.

Nothing you do on this earth, not any good test score or grade, not any high-level job, not any amount of money, success, fame, possessions, anything, can change the fact that you are forgiven. You are loved and you have a home, in heaven, forever.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we come before You seeking Your mercy and forgiveness, knowing that You will, always, every day, hour, second, make us new, and You are keeping a place for us in heaven. Help us to remember not to chase impossible standards for perfection, but rather cling to You and Your promises of love despite our imperfections. Amen.

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Grace Roberts

March 6, 2018

Age of Grace

Read: Jeremiah 31:31-24 (If time is short, read verse 33)

Wow, I am a prolific sinner! One day I tried counting my sins and lost count after the first couple of hours. These were just the ones I was aware of committing and I’m sure there were many more that I was oblivious to. God’s grace is absolutely necessary because I’m a sin machine.

After a number of years attending the Men’s Bible Study, where we alternate between Old Testament and New Testament, the Word both convicts us and points us to salvation. I have heard people say that the God of the Old Testament was an angry God full of fire and brimstone. However, after studying a number of Old Testament books, including Jeremiah, the God of the Old Testament is long suffering and extremely merciful.

God’s new covenant is prophesied by Jeremiah during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. This new covenant is different from the old covenant because God will put His law into the hearts and minds of His people. God accomplished this through Christ’s death and resurrection and the release of the Holy Spirit to indwell in us. Because of God’s grace, He will remember our sins no more with Jesus as our intercessor.

Since we are living in this age of grace, does that mean we can sin with gusto? God forbid! Let us be grateful for the freedom our heavenly Father has provided striving to become more righteous each day. When we fail, be quick to pray for forgiveness.

Prayer: Let us pray. Dear Gracious God the Father, thank You for the grace You have extended to us through Your Son Jesus. Keep us mindful of the sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf and that through Christ all of our sins have been forgiven when we come to Your judgement at the end of this age. Amen.

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Art Schroeder

March 7, 2018

Own Your Sins / Your Own Sins

Read: Ezekiel 18:25-32 (*If time is short, read verse 32*)

In my teaching career, I've had some students who have persisted in seeing themselves as victims—of “mean” parents, of classmates who “hate” them, of a teacher who expects too much of them, of a disability. Often they relish that mindset, because giving it up would mean taking responsibility for their situation and changing it. It was too hard!

Ezekiel is dealing with a nation that has that mindset. Poor them, they were suffering because of sins their ancestors had committed. They were stuck in their complaining. This was their fate; they had no choice in the matter.

Not so, Ezekiel told them. The Israelites had hung onto an old, invalid proverb as their source of wisdom. Suffering was not their fate and they did have an alternative. Instead of placing blame on others, God wanted each person to accept his own sinfulness, to repent, ask forgiveness, and live a life of freedom from his sins. Each person was responsible for making himself right with God. No one would be punished for sins committed by someone else. Neither could anyone look to claiming God's grace and forgiveness that was given for another repentant person.

The good news was that each person had a chance to repent, to change his ways, and to look to God again. God wanted to forgive and welcome repentant sinners to Him with the offer of eternal life with Him. As He says in v. 32, “For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone.”

God's grace offers that same chance to everyone today. It may often seem that we can't make the obvious right choice; so many things in our world today are competing for our time and trust. Own your sins and take them to our gracious God for forgiveness and accept His gift of new life.

Prayer: *Our dear Lord, help us to see our sins and forgive us as repentant sinners. Hold us in a close relationship with You, for both now and eternity. Amen*

How will you respond to today's Word of Grace?

Barbara Paulsen

March 12, 2018

Who Me? I'm Not Like That!

Read: Galatians 5:16-26 (*If short on time, read verse 24*)

When I first read these verses, I thought they didn't apply to me. After all, I'm only a kid. I don't engage in drunkenness, fornication or sorcery!

Upon further inspection, I realized that these verses can teach me something too. For example, jealousy can be a problem. I want to be supportive of my friends when they get a better part in a musical than I do, but inside I don't feel happy for them. I feel bad for myself. It's hard to share in their joy when they get something that I wanted very badly.

I notice other things about myself too. It's hard for me when other people say things that hurt me or make me feel inferior. I want to lash out at them and make them feel as bad as I do. Also, I can be a perfectionist in ways that make it hard to show love to others. When I see people making mistakes about things that are important to me, I get mad at them.

Even in those hard situations, I can feel God's Spirit nudging me to think of others before myself. Because Christ lives in me, I can be free of those negative thoughts and feelings. I don't have to let disappointments, hurts or mistakes bog me down. I can move on and share in other people's joy.

Prayer: *Let us pray. Dear God, We are all sinners who struggle in different ways. Please give us Your endless joy for others and resistance against the sinful desires of this world. Thank You for allowing us into Your eternal love and compassion. Amen.*

How will you respond to today's Word of Grace?

Greta Sandman

March 11, 2018

Sufficient Grace

Read: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 (*If short on time, read verse 9*)

Vs. 9: My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Speaking as a “Senior Citizen” I can say that we all have complaints and problems: “I can’t see clearly to read,” “I have difficulty hearing,” “My bones ache,” “My walking has become unsteady.”

As you read today’s Bible verses you see that St. Paul, too, suffered from some Physical problem and three times he asked God to remove it. God’s answer to St. Paul was “My grace is sufficient for you for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” In other words for Paul and for us, our weakness is meant to make God stronger in our lives. Our prayer for healing may become a plea to help us bear the burden. Our heavenly Father’s plan may not be to removed our weakness but to draw us closer to Him.

His grace may give us relief from our physical problems—maybe new glasses, cataract surgery, new hearing aids, a cane, a walker, a wheelchair, a move to a retirement community or grace to carry on with the burden.

Just as St. Paul’s answer from God was “through your weakness I will be made strong” so his physical problems made him rely on God rather than his own abilities.

What do I need? What do you need? - physical healing, forgiveness, courage, peace, safety, strength, and courage to go on? The same grace Paul received is ours also. All we have to do is ask and know that He will provide “sufficient grace.” What I know and believe is that His loving grace is all that I need, because I have His greatest gift of grace when Christ suffered, died, rose and ascended to heaven for my redemption and assurance of eternal life with Him.

Prayer: *Lord, Your boundless grace amazes me. From the time of my birth, through a physical accident, through illness, and disappointments You have never forsaken me. Instead as one of my favorite hymns says, You give me “Ten Thousand Joys.” I thank You that Your grace is always there showering me with Your “sufficient grace” throughout my life.*

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Dorothy Koopman

March 8, 2018

Grace When Confronting the Lions

Read: Daniel 6:1-25 (*If time is short, read verse 22*)

This passage is the well-known story of Daniel in the lion’s den. Daniel was an upright, God fearing man who did his earthly work diligently and was given progressive responsibility and authority. This made him the subject of envy and some of his peers plotted against him.

Daniel relied on the grace of God to do what was right in the sight of God and not the sight of man. Often these two ways aligned, but in this instance, the ways of man and God diverged. There is no mention of fear or hesitation on Daniel’s part. He was so fully reliant on God and His grace that he simply did the right thing and trusted in God to work out the outcomes.

Have you had this issue in your work place? You won’t go along with the “white lies” or not following policies, etc. and people start to resent you? I have had this happen to me very recently. Multiple complaints were lodged against me to the point that I was concerned about losing my job. At times like these, we have to rely on the grace of God. First, to give us the grace for self-examination. Is there room for improving how we are doing “the right thing”? Are we showing grace to others with compassion or being proudly self-righteous? Self-reflection revealed to me that I should be more gracious. But God also showed me where I needed to stand firm and let Him handle the consequences. Paul urges us in Galatians 6:9 to “not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” Like Daniel, rely on His grace to protect you from the lions in the den.

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, We praise You that through the blood of Your Son, we have grace that is sufficient. Please help us to live righteous lives and to rely on You when we find ourselves in the lion’s den. In the name of Jesus we pray, AMEN!*

How will you respond to today’s Word of Grace?

Gwen Enokian

March 9, 2018

There is No Time like the Present to Share God's Love

Read: Romans 5:6-11 *(If short on time, read verse 8)*

Vs. 9: But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

You may be asking yourself, where is there grace in dying? I was asking the same thing as I began to think about this devotion and as I looked at this more, I realized that God shows us grace in everything that He does. We come into this world as sinners and die to that sin when we are baptized and received into His family. But, as we all know, we continue to sin and when we confess and go back to God, He freely forgives us and welcomes us back without any question. Grace in action without any ifs, ands or buts from God. We are free to be children of God once again. This grace is free to us, but God also tells us that we should not be just sitting around waiting for this free grace, we are to go out and love our neighbors as He loves us so that others can share in this grace which comes only from God.

I have been blessed to be called by God and given the talents to be a firefighter for almost 45 years now. I know that this is a job where there are inherent dangers and I have been in positions where I have seen this cost people their lives. 1 John 3:16 says, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our life for our brothers." Not everyone is in a position where they may literally lay down their life for someone else, but we are called to go out and take a risk and show God's love to others even if we do not think it is possible. God has shown us grace over and over and we need to show others what this is. The big thing you need to know is that you do not go alone; God is there with you through the power of the Holy Spirit, showering you and your efforts with grace. So what are you waiting for?

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, help us to share Your love with others and to plant the seed so that You can shower Your grace on those who still do not know You. Thank You for the grace which You pour out on us daily. Amen.*

How will you respond to today's Word of Grace?

Gary Mayor

March 10, 2018

The Power of the Cross

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 *(If short on time, read verse 25)*

"For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength".

There are two kinds of people and the differentiating point between them is The Cross.

Non-believers think believers are foolish for trusting in something that can't be scientifically proven. While they believe in the inherent goodness of people, despite contrary observable facts, they hold that faith is based on feelings rather than evidence. Non-believers choose to live by their own judgments, rather than be held accountable to God. They boast in their achievements in the world—their education, their social status, and their wealth, which add up to significance of their own making. Unfortunately, their self-sufficiency substitutes idolatry for truth.

The Cross makes knowing God possible—and personal. It presents a Savior who gives His all for us, and asks that we give our lives to Him. Still today many choose to bypass The Cross and trust in their own "Savior"—self.

Joyfully, as Christians, we have nothing to boast about because it is God's strength rather than our own that provides the foundation of our lives. We are called to be grounded in Him so that we can walk in confidence, not in our abilities, but in our relationship with Him. We can boast only that God has been good to us, not that we have anything in our hands that commends us to God.

When Paul proclaims the "weakness of God is stronger than man's strength," Paul is talking about Christ crucified, whose submission to shameful death seemed too "weak" to be the activity of God. And yet this "weakness" surpasses man's strength, because through it God conquered sin and death.

Miraculously, ordinary people of faith can do extraordinary things if they eliminate self-esteem and put on Christ-esteem.

Prayer: *Dear Father, the idea of a world saved by Christ crucified is indeed foolishness to those who think the wisdom of the world is vested in them. How different it is for those of us who, in simple faith, know Christ crucified. We are grateful for this wisdom. Amen.*

How will you respond to today's Word of Grace?

Cheryl Farney