Week 3: *Accepting of Everyone*
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Read John 3:16 and 17

> *God so loved the world that God gave his only son, so that whoever believes in him, will have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

Make a list of different groups of people that God loves.

Is there anyone that God does not love? If so why?

Is there anything you could do that would take God's love away?

Knowing that God loves the world so much, how should we act as a church?

What do you need to do to be accepted here at Grace? What do you need to do to belong?

When I was in 8th grade, I had the hardest year of my life. It felt like when I was at school, that I could never do or say the right thing. I didn't know where I belonged. So many of my friends had changed, and the new ones that I had wanted me to be someone I wasn't. That summer I went on a trip with my church to a place called Christikon in Montana. It was beautiful. We went hiking and had bible studies. It was fun and a good place to be. But the thing I loved most about Christikon was in my small group, my counselor Steve wanted all of us to be ourselves and he listened to us completely. When I was with Steve I felt like I could just be myself and be accepted. Because of the way Steve cared for all of us, our small group started to accept each other. We still noticed that Nick couldn't pay attention very long, and we still would be annoyed Rebecca spoke out of turn, and others noticed when I also said the wrong thing, but because Steve lovingly led our group, we were transformed into people of love too. That week changed my life. I left camp much surer of myself. I made new friends the next year, and since then I have felt more comfortable being myself.

This is who I believe we need to be as a church. People who take notice of each other, people who accept people no matter what. People who listen. People who love and forgive.

Today our value is **accepting of everyone**. Here is how we define it:

> *You are invited to come as your true self, knowing that everyone else is invited to do the same. We honor and celebrate the cultural diversity of God's creation: all races and ethnicities, all genders, all sexual orientations, all abilities, all levels of education, old, young, poor, rich, conservative, liberal, single, married, certain, doubting, hurting, thriving, regardless of where you are on your faith journey. Each person brings a unique, valued and necessary perspective and voice to our community, allowing us to learn and grow in our relationship with God and with one another.*

What do you like about this definition? What do you dislike? What is missing? Are you included in this definition? If not, why not?

What image would you use to describe the kingdom of God?

Do you think in our church everyone is accepted? If not, why not? What can we do to be more accepting to all people?

Pray together:

God of acceptance, you have made us uniquely in your image, rich in diversity with different ideas and experiences and yet you have named us all beloved. Help us be your people to accept others, to speak up for people who are left out and always be on the lookout for people who need to be welcomed in care. In Jesus' name. Amen