

Grace for All

Methodist Roots: “Grace for All”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – July 28 2024

10th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: Psalm 40:4-11; Ephesians 2:1-10; Mark 10:42-52

Reflection: Psalm 84

Greeting: God’s righteousness comes through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who have faith in him. There is no distinction between people, for all have fallen short of God’s glory. But all are treated as righteous freely by his grace because of a ransom paid by Christ Jesus. Through his faithfulness, God displayed Jesus as the place of sacrifice where mercy is found by means of his blood. (Romans 3)

Prayer: Lord, we ask that you remind us of your grace that is always with us. Help us to remember that you have invited us into your steadfast love and faithfulness. That your grace is with us so that we may seek salvation in Christ our Lord. We thank you that you are with us in all things, and that you have brought us together in this place so that we may sing your praises and glorify your name. Heavenly Father, watch over us. Let your Holy Spirit guide us and lead us. And may we celebrate the love and mercy found in the life, death, and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, our rock and our redeemer. It is with hope and faith we pray this day. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 84

O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed. For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness. For the Lord God is a sun and shield; he bestows favor and honor. No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you. (Psalm 84:8-12 NRSVue)*

We read the words of Psalm 84 and hear of turning to God in all things. That the Lord invites us to faith by his grace. That we are called to follow God in doing good. That God’s faithfulness is with us when we seek to live by his unending love. How do you respond to God invitation in grace? Do you lift up prayers asking for guidance and understanding? Who can you pray with this week so that you may strengthen each other in faith? How can you share the happiness that we find when we can trust in the Lord? How can you reach out to share the love of Christ with others? How can we live out our journey in Christ together?

Prayer: God, you are there for us before we know that we need you. Help us to remember your love as we respond to your grace by accepting salvation. May you help us this day that we may remember your steadfast love and faithfulness. We come before you now with the joys and concerns that we share on this day. We turn to you now with the celebrations that we have spoken together. We turn to you with the worries that we have lifted up with each other. We also bring before you the silent troubles and triumphs that we hold within. We pray that you will lift us up in love that we may know your strength. Help us in our laughter and our tears and guide us in sorrow and rejoicing. And may we join together joyfully by faith to celebrate your presence with us in love, forever and always. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Psalm 40, verse 4 through 11.

Happy are those who make the Lord their trust, who do not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods. You have multiplied, O Lord my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you. Were I to proclaim and tell of them, they would be more than can be counted. Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, "Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; see, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O Lord. I have not hidden your saving help within my heart; I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation. Do not, O Lord, withhold your mercy from me; let your steadfast love and your faithfulness keep me safe forever. (Psalm 40:4-11 NRSVue)*

Our next reading is from Ephesians chapter 2, verse 1 through 10.

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, doing the will of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else, but God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them. (Ephesians 2:1-10 NRSVue)*

Our final reading is from Mark chapter 10, verse 42 through 52.

So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; instead, whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many." They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.
(Mark 10:42-52 NRSVue*)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This week, we take a look at God's grace as we continue to explore our Methodist roots. Part of that is the way that we understand grace. Grace is a gift that is freely given, and it is free to everyone. I chose the readings for today to reflect the different ways that grace impacts us, and the way that we respond to that grace. Now, getting into our Methodist roots, the Book of Discipline defines grace as the "the undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God in human existence through the ever-present Holy Spirit." Now, that might be a little much for you, and I'm happy to help break that down a little. At the heart of Methodism is the idea that God's grace is a free gift for all people, that it is God's love, God's care for creation, and that there are not some that it is available for and some that it is not. That for us, God's grace is available to all people. And when we look at it, Wesley had a way of talking about grace that helps us to think about the way that grace works to bring us to Christ and to continue to refine us in Christ. I say that because Wesley gives us this sort of a three-stage understanding of grace, but the third stage is a little more complicated. As we sang from Charles Wesley, we are united in the grace of Christ. It is a reminder that God's grace is there for us to respond to it. And that's one of the big ways that we begin to understand grace.

John Wesley talked about grace being prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying. Each one is an important milestone in our faith journey. We begin with an invitation to God's grace. The invitation to God's love is like God opening the door for us and inviting us to come inside. It's God reaching out to us and inviting us to walk through the door of salvation. We are invited to accept the free gift of grace that God offers to us, and God will even hold our hands to help guide us through that door. Justifying grace is our response to that invitation. It is God working through us to help us to step through that door and to accept that invitation. It is God helping us to say yes, I want to be forgiven. Yes, I want to be redeemed. Yes, I want to be saved. It is always God working through us. That prevenient grace is always there for all people as the point of invitation. It is the pull that we look for something more in this life. Justifying grace is

the saving grace that we experience when we accept God's love for us. That we understand and accept being reconciled to God. That as we live in Christ, we die in Christ, and we are raised in Christ. We gain an identity in Christ as the church by accepting that new life. Now, once we go through that door, we experience sanctifying grace, the grace that perfects us. It is the process in which the Holy Spirit helps us to do the works that we do to share God's love. It is all the things we do to reflect God's love. In a few weeks, we'll be talking more about the means of grace as part of our next series with the way that Wesley talked about Christian perfection and the way that Wesley talked about how we live out that grace. But for a short understanding, it's the way that we live out God's grace by the Holy Spirit. It is the way that the Spirit works through us to help us to do the work of God.

Our readings today reflect this idea of grace. Each of them has a different way that we can understand grace in our own lives. In Mark, Jesus talks about what it means to accept God's grace. Jesus talks about how he was called to serve and not to be served. That the call was that he should give his life as a ransom for many so that we would understand the gift of God's grace. That we would get that invitation. We see that invitation with a man who is blind calling out for mercy. One way we could see this is that he is responding to the invitation being made in grace. He is being drawn to Christ to be healed. And it is an act of faith on his part. He believes Jesus has the power to heal, so he calls out, even when others try to silence him. So, Jesus invites him over and tells him it is his faith that has made him well. His faith as a response to God's grace. We hear about grace in Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. In Ephesians, we hear about the way that we take up a life in Christ. That we were once dead to sin and now live in Christ. That when we have taken that step of accepting God's love, God's grace, into our lives, that we understand that by grace we have been saved. That even though we were dead, we are alive because of Christ. That it was God that invited us in, and it was by God that we were able to walk through that door to accept that grace. And it is by God that we will be able to show our thankfulness. That it's not our own doing, that it's not something that we can brag about. We cannot proclaim that we are the elect, that we are the chosen, because that would imply that we did something only God can do. I have looked around a long time, and I still cannot find anyone that has not been invited to share in the love of Christ. I have yet to find anyone that has not been invited to step through that door to be redeemed by God's grace. I know that it was God that helped me to make that choice, to walk through that door, to support me even in the difficult times, and it is by God's grace that I continue to do what I can to serve Christ, to do what I can to serve God's people, to do the good works that God has prepared for us to do. And because God's grace has gotten me this far, I trust it to continue to push me further. I included Psalm 40 because I feel like Psalm 40 helps to give us that picture of what it's like to continue on in that grace. That we can be happy when we trust in God. That it's God that multiplies our deeds, that it is God who pushes us ahead, God who helps us to help each other. That God doesn't want sacrifices and burnt offerings. That we should delight to do God's will, because it is doing God's will that pleases God. It is the reason that we have been invited into this grace, and that we are called to share the good news.

Not that grace is only for some, not that it is something that you must go and earn, but it is a free gift for all people, anywhere and everywhere. That idea of grace being for everyone was a major point in our Methodist heritage. Because we don't hold to the idea that there are some that are chosen and some that are not in the Methodist church, because Scripture does not tell us that there are some that are unable to respond to God's grace. Scripture does not tell us that there are some that cannot be saved, because Scripture does not tell us that God is powerless. Scripture does not tell us that the Holy Spirit cannot move. Scripture does not tell us that Jesus died for some, because it tells us Christ died for all, so that all could be forgiven. And I emphasize this because it's important for us to know that that grace is there not just for us, but for everyone. It helps us to grow and to learn. It helps us to help one another. Christ came that we could be healed, that all people could be healed, that all people could experience God's grace so that all people could experience God's love. We experience grace in different ways. That's why it's so important that we respond to that grace in ways that help others to see God's love. Because not everyone knows what that invitation means, when they feel that tug on their heart. People feel it in different ways. Sometimes it's being drawn to the communion table. It's why it is open to all people, that all are invited to share, because it is by God's grace alone that we are saved. Maybe it is having somebody to pray with during difficulty. That someone feels that tug on their heart and realize it is God's grace. That it is God saying that he will see them through the hardship and the trouble and that they have a community in Christ to rely upon. Maybe it is someone having their heart strangely warmed after meeting with others who share their experience of Christ. It could be a whole myriad of different ways that we experience the love of God in our lives, but it's important that we know that we can respond to that grace. It is an ongoing process in our faith journey. We accept the grace of God, we let grace make us whole, and we continue to let it guide us and lead us, so that we may continue to do the work of Christ wherever we are and wherever we go. That we may serve all of God's children so that all may know love, and that all may know the peace of Christ in their lives. So that all may know God's grace is for you, is for me, and is for everyone. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Methodist Roots

We begin a series that looks at our Methodist heritage. "Methodist Roots" will be a six week look at the way that we follow Christ as United Methodists. We will be discussing the way that we live our lives in Christ, how we study, and how we interact with each other.

7/14: 3 Simple Rules

7/21: Reading Scripture

7/28: Grace for All

8/4: Good Works

8/11: Think and Let Think

8/18: The Individual in the Community

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Toledo UMC

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Worship 8:15am

Etna UMC

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Worship 9:30am

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