Grace in Aisle 3: Open 24/7

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – September 6 2026

15th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: Isaiah 65:1,8-10,17-19; 1 John 4:7-16; Luke 15:1-10 CEB

Reflection: Psalm 27 CEB

Call to Worship: Before we knew God in our hearts, he already was calling out to us to welcome us. Before we loved God, God in his grace loved us first. Before we knew we were lost, God was already searching for us so we. We come to worship the God whose grace is always open to all. Praise the Lord!

Prayer: Loving God, we give thanks for your grace. We come to you, seeking the bounty of your love. We enter the store of your plenty, knowing that you are always there for us. We know of the many ways that you provide all that we need in this life. May you continue to guide us and lead us so that we may grow in faith. May you renew and refresh us this day, that we may learn to rely on you for all things. Your steadfast love and faithfulness shine like and open sign, guiding us to your grace, letting us know that you are there for us all day every day. We see the plenty you have for us, like the overflowing shelves of a marketplace. There is always enough for everyone because of you, Lord. We find in you all that we need, and you fill the cart of our hearts full of all that is right and good. Help us to share your peace and love with each other. Let us sing of your salvation and lift up our prayers to you as we rejoice. May you guide us and lead us in all that we are and all that we do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 27

> *7 Lord, listen to my voice when I cry out— have mercy on me and answer me! 8 Come, my heart says, seek God's face. Lord, I do seek your face! 9 Please don't hide it from me! Don't push your servant aside angrily— you have been my help! God who saves me, don't neglect me! Don't leave me all alone! 10 Even if my father and mother left me all alone, the Lord would take me in. 11 Lord, teach me your way; because of my opponents, lead me on a good path. (Psalm 27:7-11 CEB+)*

We read the words of Psalm 27, and we hear how God is always there for us. That no matter where we are and what we are doing, the Lord is with us. That even if everyone else were to walk away, God would be there for us. Do you trust that God is always there to welcome you? Do you know in your heart that God welcomes you to experience his grace in your life? Who can you lift up in your prayers this week? Who can you invite to share in the peace of Christ?

Prayer: Most wonderful God, we seek your grace and your mercy in our lives today. We ask that you bring us into the storehouse of your love. We pray for wisdom and courage so that we

may do what is right and good. May we welcome your salvation, like a bountiful blessing in our lives. That the free gift of grace you have given is something we cherish and we share. We celebrate the hope that we have because of the abundance of your compassion for your people. We turn to you with the good, the bad, and the unknown so that you may show us the way to go. Help us to remember your love in our laughter and in our tears. May we know your grace through our sorrow and our rejoicing. May your peace be with us so that we may guide others into your steadfast love and faithfulness, so that all may know of the hope that we find in Jesus Christ our Lord. 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 Common English Bible. Our first reading is from Isaiah chapter 65 verses 1, 8 through 10 and 17 through 19.

> ***65*** *I was ready to respond to those who didn't ask. I was ready to be found by those who didn't look for me. I said, "I'm here! I'm here!" to a nation that didn't call on my name.*
> *8 The Lord proclaims: As new wine is found in the grape cluster, and someone says, "Don't destroy it, for there is a blessing in it," so I will do for the sake of my servants and not destroy everything: 9 I will bring out offspring from Jacob, and from Judah, heirs to my mountains. My chosen ones will take possession; my servants will dwell there. 10 Sharon will become a pasture for sheep, and the Achor Valley a resting place for cattle, for my people who seek me. 17 Look! I'm creating a new heaven and a new earth: past events won't be remembered; they won't come to mind. 18 Be glad and rejoice forever in what I'm creating, because I'm creating Jerusalem as a joy and her people as a source of gladness. 19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad about my people. No one will ever hear the sound of weeping or crying in it again. (Isaiah 65:1,8-10,17-19 CEB+)*

Our second reading is from 1 John chapter 4, verse 7 through 16.

> *7 Dear friends, let's love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. 8 The person who doesn't love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how the love of God is revealed to us: God has sent his only Son into the world so that we can live through him. 10 This is love: it is not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as the sacrifice that deals with our sins. 11 Dear friends, if God loved us this way, we also ought to love each other. 12 No one has ever seen God. If we love each other, God remains in us and his love is made perfect in us. 13 This is how we know we remain in him and he remains in us, because he has given us a measure of his Spirit. 14 We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the savior of the world. 15 If any of us confess that Jesus is God's Son, God remains in us and we remain*

in God. [16] We have known and have believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who remain in love remain in God and God remains in them. (1 John 4:7-16 CEB+)

Our final reading is from Matthew chapter 7 verses 21 through 29.

15 *All the tax collectors and sinners were gathering around Jesus to listen to him. [2] The Pharisees and legal experts were grumbling, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." [3] Jesus told them this parable: [4] "Suppose someone among you had one hundred sheep and lost one of them. Wouldn't he leave the other ninety-nine in the pasture and search for the lost one until he finds it? [5] And when he finds it, he is thrilled and places it on his shoulders. [6] When he arrives home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Celebrate with me because I've found my lost sheep.' [7] In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who changes both heart and life than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need to change their hearts and lives. [8] "Or what woman, if she owns ten silver coins and loses one of them, won't light a lamp and sweep the house, searching her home carefully until she finds it? [9] When she finds it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Celebrate with me because I've found my lost coin.' [10] In the same way, I tell you, joy breaks out in the presence of God's angels over one sinner who changes both heart and life." (Luke 15:1-10 CEB+)*

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

This week begins a series I am calling "Grace in Aisle 3." What I wanted to do with this series was to look at grace with a metaphor that I thought would be easy to understand. And so, the metaphor I wanted to use was the idea of a store. Thinking of different ways to look at the store helps us to visualize different kinds of grace. For this first message, I wanted to think about the idea of grace being an open sign. That God's prevenient grace is there for us before we ever know that we need it. Just as the store's open sign is there before we ever pull up. But when we realize we need it, seeing that sign that says open 24/7 is the reminder that no matter when it is, God's grace is there available for us. And that was the picture that I had in my head as I began to think about this. Because God's grace is a gift that's always available. That it is always there inviting us in. Always there to help us take that first step. I picked some readings to go with that idea for today.

The first is from Isaiah. I felt that opening line really highlighted that idea of God being there for us. "I was ready to respond to those who didn't ask. I was ready to be found by those who didn't look for me. I said, "I'm here! I'm here!" to a nation that didn't call on my name." And it's that thought that God is there even when we aren't looking. That God is there waiting for us. Waiting for us to see that open 24/7 sign and to walk in. That we may not know where to look and we may not know what to expect, but when we have that welcome invitation, we know that we can. And that's how God invites us in. That God is at work before we realize it. God's love is there for us before we know that we need it. God loves us before we can love him. This is the grace that comes before everything else. When we talk about prevenient grace, it's the grace

that comes before we are able to do anything. And it's the grace that lets us know that we need God. When I thought about that open sign, it really was that idea that God is there for us even before we know we need God. But that when we see that, we realize that any time is a good time to turn to the Lord.

Because God is love. And that's what we hear in our reading from 1 John. That we should love each other because love is from God. And everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. That God is love. And if God loves us, we should love each other. Simple as that. When we see that open sign welcoming us in, it is a sign we know is there for everyone. That there isn't a special sign just made for you or for me. It's for all of us to know that we are all welcome and we are all loved. That God's love is made perfect in us. And that is a beautiful thing to know we are loved. And it's something we can share. And it's something we experience together. That we acknowledge God's love is there for us as we acknowledge the ways we are helped. We see how much we have to gain because God is with us. That that grace invites us in to experience that love. There are many different ways that we can experience that love. Communion being one of them. Because it's a way that God reaches out to let us share together.

Sharing that love together, knowing that we are all welcome, is something we hear about from our gospel reading. Because there, we hear about people who are upset about the open sign. They don't want the sign to say “Open 24/7.” They want the sign to say “open to select few.” And they want the sign to be restricted to specific hours on specific days because they only want certain people to come in. Because they see Jesus and he is eating with sinners. This upsets them. They begin to complain so Jesus tells a set of parables. That if someone had a hundred sheep and lost one, that they go after the one. The same way that the Lord rejoices over one person that is found. The same way that the Lord rejoices when we have one sinner that has changed heart and life. Or that if a woman lost one of her ten silver coins, that she would light a lamp, sweep the house and search until she finds it. And they will celebrate finding the lost coin. Because God celebrates when any sinner changes heart and life. Because God's love and grace invite us to that change. God's grace is there to invite us to start that journey. But we can't start that journey until we are willing to take that first step.

And going back to our metaphor, it's taking that step, seeing that sign that says “Open 24/7” and walking through those doors. Knowing that what we need is inside and that God has made it available to us any time of any day. That there is no wrong time to turn to God. And this is one of those things that I think can be hard. I don't think it's hard because thinking of God as being inclusive is hard. I think it's hard because too often we think of the people we would leave out of that. Too often we are busy thinking about who we wouldn't invite, while God is busy inviting everyone. I think it challenges us. Because it makes us have to admit that God's love is so vast that it can be hard for us to understand it. It can be a difficult thing for us to address. But I think it's important that we are willing to look at it. Because God's grace being there for everyone is an important part of our faith journey. Because at some point we were all

standing on that threshold. At some point we were all searching and looking for that sign that say “Open 24/7.” Because we were in search of grace. Even if we didn't know that's what we needed, we were searching for something that was missing and we found it.

And so now we call others to find it. And I think that's one of the important things that we have to remember is that we too can be instruments of God's grace. That we can tell people where to find that store that is always open. Where people can find the grace they need. That we can be the ones that guide people in the path. Because maybe we are the instrument God is using to have his grace reach another. Because I will never rule out what God might need to do and who God might need to use. So, I pray that we can remember God's grace in our lives. That we can remember all of those things that God has done for us and that we may share them with others. And that we may guide others to see that “Open 24/7” sign and that they may find grace within. Because God always invites us to come and to share and to be together. So let us join with one another and let us share in God's grace together. That we may celebrate the blessing of God's love in all of our lives. 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 eternal life. 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 – Grace in Aisle 3

Our series has us looking at grace through the idea of a shopping trip. Each week we will explore a different idea of grace by using that as our guide. We will see the open sign welcoming us in, we have the coupon in our hands to get what we need, and no matter what we seek we can find it. Let us always share in God's abundant grace!

9/6: Open 24/7 9/13: No Expiration 9/20: Cart of Plenty

Neoga Grace UMC
752 Walnut
PO Box 610
Neoga, IL 62447
(217)895-2809
Worship 10:30am

Toledo UMC
Madison & Ohio St
PO Box 267
Toledo, IL 62468
Worship 8:15am

Etna UMC
2799 Etna Rd
Mattoon, IL 61938
Worship 9:30a

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