Grace in Aisle 3: No Expiration

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – September 13 2026

16th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: Isaiah 55:1-5; Romans 5:12-17; Luke 7:36-50 CEB

Reflection: Psalm 32 CEB

Call to Worship: God's mercy has no price; all who thirst for it, come! Grace is freely given at God's table; all who hunger, come! Christ redeems us, not by the worth we see in ourselves but by God's love. We come to worship the God whose forgiveness never expires. 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 an 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 32

> ***32*** *The one whose wrongdoing is forgiven, whose sin is covered over, is truly happy!* ***5*** *So I admitted my sin to you; I didn't conceal my guilt. "I'll confess my sins to the Lord, " is what I said. Then you removed the guilt of my sin.* ***6*** *That's why all the faithful should pray to you during troubled times, so that a great flood of water won't reach them.* ***7*** *You are my secret hideout! You protect me from trouble. You surround me with songs of rescue!*
> *(Psalm 32:1,5-7 CEB+)*

We read the words of Psalm 32, and we hear how God has forgiven us. That when we confess our sins, the Lord removes any guilt. That the free gift of grace covers any of our failings and we are saved from our troubles. Do you trust that God's free grace is for you? Do you know in your heart that God welcomes you to seek pardon and restoration? 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 55 verse 1 through 5.

> ***55*** *All of you who are thirsty, come to the water! Whoever has no money, come, buy food and eat! Without money, at no cost, buy wine and milk!* ***2*** *Why spend money for what isn't food, and your earnings for what doesn't satisfy? Listen carefully to me and eat what is good; enjoy the richest of feasts.* ***3*** *Listen and come to me; listen, and you will live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful loyalty to David.* ***4*** *Look, I made him a witness to the peoples, a prince and commander of peoples.* ***5*** *Look, you will call a nation you don't know, a nation you don't know will run to you because of the Lord your God, the holy one of Israel, who has glorified you. (Isaiah 55:1-5 CEB+)*

Our second reading is from Romans chapter 5, verse 12 through 17.

> ***12*** *Just as through one human being sin came into the world, and death came through sin, so death has come to everyone, since everyone has sinned.* ***13*** *Although sin was in the world, since there was no Law, it wasn't taken into account until the Law came.* ***14*** *But death ruled from Adam until Moses, even over those who didn't sin in the same way Adam did—Adam was a type of the one who was coming.* ***15*** *But the free gift of Christ isn't like Adam's failure. If many people died through what one person did wrong, God's grace is multiplied even more for many people with the gift—of the one person Jesus Christ—that comes through grace.* ***16*** *The gift isn't like the consequences of one person's sin. The judgment that came from one person's sin led to punishment, but the free gift that came out of many failures led to the verdict of acquittal.* ***17*** *If death ruled because of one person's failure, those who receive the multiplied grace and the gift of righteousness will even more certainly rule in life through the one person Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:12-17 CEB+)*

Our final reading is from Luke chapter 7 verses 36 through 50.

[36] One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to eat with him. After he entered the Pharisee's home,
he took his place at the table. [37] Meanwhile, a woman from the city, a sinner, discovered that
Jesus was dining in the Pharisee's house. She brought perfumed oil in a vase made of
alabaster. [38] Standing behind him at his feet and crying, she began to wet his feet with her
tears. She wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and poured the oil on them. [39] When the
Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw what was happening, he said to himself, If this man
were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. He would know that
she is a sinner. [40] Jesus replied, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher, speak,"
he said. [41] "A certain lender had two debtors. One owed enough money to pay five hundred
people for a day's work. The other owed enough money for fifty. [42] When they couldn't pay,
the lender forgave the debts of them both. Which of them will love him more?" [43] Simon
replied, "I suppose the one who had the largest debt canceled." Jesus said, "You have
judged correctly." [44] Jesus turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this
woman? When I entered your home, you didn't give me water for my feet, but she wet my
feet with tears and wiped them with her hair. [45] You didn't greet me with a kiss, but she
hasn't stopped kissing my feet since I came in. [46] You didn't anoint my head with oil, but she
has poured perfumed oil on my feet. [47] This is why I tell you that her many sins have been
forgiven; so she has shown great love. The one who is forgiven little loves little." [48] Then
Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." [49] The other table guests began to say among
themselves, "Who is this person that even forgives sins?" [50] Jesus said to the woman, "Your
faith has saved you. Go in peace." (Luke 7:36-50 CEB+)

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

This week, in our "Grace in Aisle 3" series, we have the idea of "No Expiration." For that, I want to use the idea of a coupon. And not just any coupon. A coupon that has no expiration date. A coupon you never have to turn in. Because it is a coupon for God's grace. I thought that it worked very well with this idea because it is something that we get for free. A gift that never expires, that never runs out, that is always there. That when we turn to God for God's grace, we will always find it. I wanted to use this idea of a coupon because it is that thought that is there waiting. But it takes our action to accept that grace and to use that grace. And I wanted to look at it through this lens so that we might be able to think about justifying grace in a new way.

It is the type of thing we hear in Isaiah. Because it is an open invitation for all people to come to the waters. If you are thirsty, you should drink. If you are hungry, you should buy food and eat. But it costs nothing to you. Because God provides for his people. That God gives us what it is we need. That when we enter the storehouse of God's wonder and God's glory, we have that coupon in hand, ready to redeem for God's grace and love. That it is something that we all can access and it is something we should call others to. That is what we hear in Isaiah as well. That we should call the people around us to come to the Lord because the coupon is for them as well. That God's grace is available to all people. We just have to accept that grace in

our own lives and to take that free gift that is being offered. It is that gift that helps us to find forgiveness.

But it is not a onetime thing. It is an all the time thing. It is what we hear in Romans. Because Paul is talking about how sin came into the world. He gives us an interesting way to think about this. Sin came into the world through one human being, and so death comes to the world. But the free gift of grace isn't like the failure. Because the free gift of grace is that through one person, that person being Jesus Christ, grace comes to all people. That the free gift lets us find forgiveness in Christ. That we escape our failures. That we escape that endless cycle of hurt. Because we find love. Because we find life and not death. That when we exchange that coupon for God's grace, we find hope instead of despair. We find love instead of hate. We find forgiveness instead of judgment. Because no matter how many times we fail, the coupon is still good. No matter how many times we mess up, grace is still there. And if death could rule us because of one person's failure, how much more will the gift of righteousness be through the love of Christ? That is the miracle of God's grace. We are welcomed in to God's home. That we are welcomed into that forgiveness. A gift that we can share. Because as it turns out, you can share that coupon with anyone. It will be good for both of you. Because that's how God's love is.

It's what we hear when we hear Jesus in our reading from Luke. He is at dinner at the home of one of the Pharisees. And while he's there this woman brings perfumed oil and she anoints his feet, crying while she does it. Some people are upset at this because they see this woman, this woman they don't think much of, attending to Jesus. She's a sinner, and so she shouldn't even be allowed to touch him in their opinion. She shouldn't be allowed to come near. Now, Jesus could have just corrected them and been done with it. But he decides to give them something to think about. And this is something I love about the way that Jesus teaches. He lets people come to the conclusion themselves, to make his point for him. He tells them this story about two people who have been forgiven. One had a much larger debt than the other. One was 500 days wages, the other only owed 50. Neither could pay and so they are both forgiven. But Jesus asks this really important question. Which one is going to love the one that canceled the debt more? Jesus lets him answer for himself, and he tells Jesus the one who had the larger debt cancelled is going to love more. Jesus tells him that's right. But then he turns it around and applies it to that woman anointing his feet. And he points out his host did nothing for him that this woman is doing. His host did not give him water for his feet, but she wet his feet with her tears. His host did not greet him with a kiss, but she has not stopped kissing his feet. His host did not anoint his head with oil, but this lowly sinner poured oil on his feet. She truly honored him in her heart. Jesus says that her sins have been forgiven and because of that she has shown great love. “The one who is forgiven little loves little.” And Jesus just tells her, “your sins are forgiven.” She was so thankful for that coupon that she went out of her way to show Jesus how much she appreciated that kind of love. That she was so happy for that grace she anointed his feet and cried. And while everyone else is busy thinking

about her failures, Jesus sees her as a person. That's the big thing that we have to look at when we think about how we accept God's grace and share it. When you are forgiven a lot, you have a lot to be thankful for. When you can accept that forgiveness down to your core, you know how much you have to be thankful for. And for me the true response to that is not that you keep it to yourself. Instead, be like this woman did with Jesus. She made a very public showing of how thankful she was. Because she wanted people to know how grateful she was and she wanted to honor Jesus.

When I think about grace, I think about that coupon. That free gift that is given to us all. That when we enter that storehouse of God's love, we carry that coupon with us to redeem for whatever we need to be forgiven for, and it will be forgiven. As long as we turn to God with hearts and lives ready to be transformed. Because you can only cash this coupon in for God's grace if you are willing to bring it up front to that register and say “I need this in my life.” Because we have to redeem the coupon for it to be good. But to redeem it we have to be willing to say what it is we need that grace for. That we need God's love and God's forgiveness in our lives. That we want our hearts and lives to be changed and that we need God's grace. And that can be a challenge. It can be a challenge because we don't like admitting we need help. We don't like admitting our failures. We don't like admitting that we may not have lived up to expectations. But the coupon is there so that we can redeem it so that we can continue to live our lives, and we can continue to share God's grace with others. Because what Jesus is saying is that we have no need to be ashamed of wanting God's help. That if we are thankful for God's forgiveness we should say it proudly. That we should be willing to redeem that coupon any place any time. That whatever it is we need to be forgiven for, whatever it is we need help with in our lives, God is there with the free gift of grace. It's that grace we search for in our lives.

And so, I pray that as we are searching that storehouse of God's blessings and as we search the shelves for what it is we need, that we are willing to take it into our hearts and we will redeem that coupon. That we will not just hold it in our hands and think about the gift. That we will not just think about the coupon being in our pocket, but that we will use that gift to its fullest measure. To be forgiven so that we can forgive. Because those who are forgiven much love much. Let us be a people that shows great love because we are willing to be forgiven and we are willing to forgive. Because Christ walks with us so that we can redeem that coupon for God's grace. That we can shout from the rooftops that others may know grace is there for them. That we can all find God's grace and love always, with no expiration. 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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