Grace in Aisle 3: Cart of Plenty

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – September 20 2026

17th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: Ezekiel 36:22-28; Philippians 1:3-11; John 6:1-14 CEB

Reflection: Psalm 65 CEB

Call to Worship: God gives us a fresh start, with a new heart and a new spirit. God continues to the good work in us constantly. Christ provides more than enough, with grace overflowing. We come to worship the God who always has what we need. 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 65

> ***9*** *You visit the earth and make it abundant, enriching it greatly by God's stream, full of water. You provide people with grain because that is what you've decided.* ***10*** *Drenching the earth's furrows, leveling its ridges, you soften it with rain showers; you bless its growth.* ***11*** *You crown the year with your goodness; your paths overflow with rich food.* ***12*** *Even the desert pastures drip with it, and the hills are dressed in pure joy.* ***13*** *The meadowlands are covered with flocks, the valleys decked out in grain— they shout for joy; they break out in song!*
> *(Psalm 65:9-13 CEB+)*

We read the words of Psalm 65, and we hear how God provides for us. That we show our joy at knowing that God is there for us no matter what is happening. That whatever it is we need, the Lord will share that grace with you. Do you remember that God is always there for you with what it is you need? Do you share that blessing with others? How has God's grace impacted 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 Ezekiel chapter 36 verse 22 through 28.

22 Therefore, say to the house of Israel, The Lord God proclaims: House of Israel, I'm not acting for your sake but for the sake of my holy name, which you degraded among the nations where you have gone. 23 I will make my great name holy, which was degraded among the nations when you dishonored it among them. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord. This is what the Lord God says. When I make myself holy among you in their sight, 24 I will take you from the nations, I will gather you from all the countries, and I will bring you to your own fertile land. 25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be cleansed of all your pollution. I will cleanse you of all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove your stony heart from your body and replace it with a living one, 27 and I will give you my spirit so that you may walk according to my regulations and carefully observe my case laws. 28 Then you will live in the land that I gave to your ancestors, you will be my people, and I will be your God. (Ezekiel 36:22-28 CEB+)

Our second reading is from Philippians chapter 1, verse 3 through 11.

3 I thank my God every time I mention you in my prayers. 4 I'm thankful for all of you every time I pray, and it's always a prayer full of joy. 5 I'm glad because of the way you have been my partners in the ministry of the gospel from the time you first believed it until now. 6 I'm sure about this: the one who started a good work in you will stay with you to complete the job by the day of Christ Jesus. 7 I have good reason to think this way about all of you because I keep you in my heart. You are all my partners in God's grace, both during my time in prison and in the defense and support of the gospel. 8 God is my witness that I feel affection for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. 9 This is my prayer: that your love might become even more and more rich with knowledge and all kinds of insight. 10 I pray this so that you will be able to decide what really matters and so you will be sincere and blameless on the day of Christ. 11 I pray that you will then be filled with the fruit of righteousness, which comes from Jesus Christ, in order to give glory and praise to God. (Philippians 1:3-11 CEB+)

Our final reading is from John chapter 6 verses 1 through 14.

6 *After this Jesus went across the Galilee Sea (that is, the Tiberias Sea). 2 A large crowd followed him, because they had seen the miraculous signs he had done among the sick. 3 Jesus went up a mountain and sat there with his disciples. 4 It was nearly time for Passover, the Jewish festival. 5 Jesus looked up and saw the large crowd coming toward him. He asked Philip, "Where will we buy food to feed these people?" 6 Jesus said this to*

test him, for he already knew what he was going to do. [7] Philip replied, "More than a half year's salary worth of food wouldn't be enough for each person to have even a little bit." [8] One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said, [9] "A youth here has five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that for a crowd like this?" [10] Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass there. They sat down, about five thousand of them. [11] Then Jesus took the bread. When he had given thanks, he distributed it to those who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish, each getting as much as they wanted. [12] When they had plenty to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather up the leftover pieces, so that nothing will be wasted." [13] So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves that had been left over by those who had eaten. [14] When the people saw that he had done a miraculous sign, they said, "This is truly the prophet who is coming into the world." (John 6:1-14 CEB+)

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

This week we reach the end of our "Grace in Aisle 3" series as we look at our "Cart of Plenty." The example I wanted to use was the full shelves in God's storehouse and the way that we can fill our cart with whatever it is we need because of God's sanctifying grace. The grace that is working through us, continually helping us to be better and to do better. That it is God's continual work in us, making us whole. God providing whatever it is we need as we continue along. That we find God's love always there for us. When we think about it as that shopping cart, it is all the things that we need. That when we go looking, we will always find more than enough. Whatever it is we need we can put it in our cart and find what it is we need to be able to be whole.

I wanted to look at a few different readings today to get this feeling of God's plenty. Our first was from Ezekiel. There we hear about God reaching out to provide everything that his people need. That even when people turn away God is still there working in them to help them. That God is doing the work to help us to be the best we can and to do all we can. We hear about him giving us a new heart and a new spirit. That God isn't just giving up on us, but God is giving us what it is we need to be able to change our hearts and our lives. And he is continually helping us to make those changes. That it is not some one-time offer that we ask to be changed and if we can't change right away that we're done for. No, God is continually working. Because his goal isn't that we be changed once. The goal is that we will be his people and he will be our God. A continuous relationship. When we think about it with that metaphor of the store, it's not that he wants us to come and go shopping once. That we will one day find all that we need and never return. That whatever it is we need we will always find it on those shelves and that there will always be plenty in our cart. Because we will always need something more. Because as we get that new heart and that new spirit, as we work with all of those things, we grow. As we grow, we change and we need new things. The blessing is that we will still always find them with our God. Because he will always be our God if we are God's people.

We hear much of that same thinking in our reading from Philippians. There we hear about Paul's prayer, thankful for everyone. A prayer full of joy because of the people that he is in ministry with. He thinks about those good works that are continued in us because of Christ, because of how we work together and how we share God's grace together. Because God's grace is there for everyone and there for us to share with each other. Paul is ecstatic about being able to share that ministry. Because of that his prayer is that our love might become even

more and more rich with knowledge and all kinds of insight. That as we grow and we learn that our knowledge grows and our love grows. And that every time God's grace moves us forward. That God shares of that blessing so that we will always have more than we need. That we can fill our cart to the brim and we are always welcome to come back for more. That we can share that bounty of God's grace. So that we can be sincere, so we can be genuine and we can share God's love earnestly. That God's grace will fill us all with the desire to be more and to do more. That God's grace will continually work in us. Because having that cart full of blessings is not about fulfilling just what it is we need bodily but what we need spiritually. That it's full of wisdom and grace and understanding and knowledge. Because we should grow in grace. We should grow in understanding. We should grow in wisdom. We should grow in our knowledge so that our love grows by the same measure. Because when we know more we can love more. When we are willing to do more we can love more. And when we let God work in us by the Holy Spirit we will always grow by faith and by wisdom, and that we will grow with God. Because God will always provide.

That's what we hear in our gospel reading. Because there it's made clear that God will provide. When we hear about Jesus having compassion for the people who have come to listen to him. One of the things that this tells us is that we are better together. And I know that's not always the first thing that people take from this. Because yes, it is a story of blessings, and it is a miracle story. But part of that miracle is that we come together and trust each other. When we share together God's blessing overflows. Because that is what we see in this story. Jesus is there with this crowd. They have seen the healing. They have heard his message, and they want more so they follow. Jesus asks how it is they are going to feed these people. The disciples worry that they don't have enough for this large crowd. But Andrew is still thinking, still wanting to at least have something. I think that's one of the key things here. He notes that a youth has five loaves and two fish but he's worried that that's not good enough for a crowd like this. But he still brings it up and it's good that he does. Because Jesus has them get the people to sit. They sit down and Jesus breaks the bread. Together this crowd has come to take part in God's plenty, and they are shown that God provides. Jesus breaks the bread and shares it, and then he does the same with the fish, everyone sharing with each other. That's one of the important things I wanted to mention in this. They distribute it, all of them passing this along, finding that there's enough for everyone. Because that's how God's grace works. It never runs out. No matter how much you put in your cart, there is still enough for everyone else's cart. That too often in this life we would be fighting over what was in that basket. But Jesus blesses it and hands it out and says to share among each other. And when these people trust in Christ, they find there is truly enough for everyone. They understand the miraculous sign. I think it's important that we can picture this not just as a miracle story, but as a story about how God's grace works in our lives.

Because we do often start to worry about if there's enough for everyone. But we start applying it to things that should never have that concern. We get worried that someone is going to use up all the happiness and there won't be any happiness left for us. But that's not how happiness works. We are worried if somebody gets a blessing that we will not get one. But that is not how God's blessing works. We may be worried that if somebody gets all of God's grace, there won't be any left for us. But that is not how God works. There is enough for you to have your heart and life changed and for you to be blessed with whatever it is you need. That you will have enough to share that blessing with others and that they will have enough to share

that blessing with others. Because God's grace never runs out. God is always restocking those shelves so that you can put more and more into your cart. There is never a time when you will find those shelves empty in the storehouse of God's love. Because God is always making sure that we will find what it is we need to have our hearts and our lives changed. That is why we have to think about that cart of plenty as something that we will always find and can always share. Because we have to stop thinking that we won't have enough. Because we are not in competition for God's love. We are not in competition for God's grace.

That open sign has invited us in so that we can peruse those shelves. We have been given the coupon for God's grace that never expires so that we know we can pick up whatever it is we need. God invites us again and again to come back for more. Because there will always be more for us to discover. Because God's grace will always be there for us to find whatever it is we need. We just have to be willing to do the work with God. Because one of the themes through this is that we are responsible for our response to God's grace. That if we are going to have a cart of plenty, we have to be willing to look for what it is and take it off the shelf. We have seen the open sign and accepted the invitation in. We have been given that coupon and we hold it in our hands. Now it is our turn to look at the shelves and seek what it is we need and be willing to put it in our cart and take it to God in prayer. Whatever it is we need God will provide. But we have to be willing to do the hard work of figuring out what it is we need. We have to go and search it on those shelves, to use it, and to come back next time with whatever it is we need next. Because that's the thing about God's grace. It is not a one-time deal. Because it is an ongoing relationship and it's one we witness in our relationship with each other. Because one of the signs that we have accepted God's grace in our lives is our willingness to share that grace with others. Because if we have truly had our hearts and our lives changed by God's grace, we will be willing to share it with others. We will be letting others know what it is we have found and the joy that we find there. Because it is not something we ever keep to ourselves. It is something that we share with one another gladly. So, I pray we may celebrate. That we may celebrate that God's grace is there inviting us in like a sign that reads open 24-7. That God's grace is there always free with no expiration date, ready for us whenever we call on God and that the blessing of God is there for all of us. Because God's grace is always where we need it with what we need, if we are willing to accept that change in our hearts and our lives. We must be willing to not just accept God's grace but to work with God to be the best that we can and to do the best that we can. That we may always know that God's grace is there for us to fill our cart of plenty. 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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