

“Grace is Love in Action”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia
HEARTS UNBOUND Sermon Series
Day of Pentecost, Sunday, May 15, 2016
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Holy Scriptures: Luke 10: 25-37 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Luke 10

²⁵ Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” ²⁷ He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” ²⁸ And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ ³⁶ Which of

these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

The Resurrection of Christ

1 Corinthians 15

Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand,² through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.³ For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures,⁴ and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died.⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

Putting Grace into Practice

The Apostle Paul wrote to God’s people in Corinth:

“But by the grace of God I am what I am,

and his grace toward me has not been in vain.

On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them

—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

*Whether then it was I or they,
so we proclaim
and so you have come to believe.” (1 Cor. 15: 10-11)*

We who are the beneficiaries of God’s grace
are invited by Christ to pass it on.

Who do you know who needs to hear a good
word today?

We who are the recipients of grace extended by family and
friends and strangers
are invited to extend grace to someone else, to many,
many “someone else’s”.

Who encouraged you?

Who reminded you that you are a child
of God?

Who in your sphere of influence hungers for an
encouraging word?

We who believe and doubt, wonder and question
are invited to see that what matters most is how we
practice what we believe.

It is not in vain that we share, that we testify from our hearts,
that we bear witness

with our bodies and words, our actions and listening
presence.

Practice and proclaim what you believe,
and it will not be in vain

because neighbors will come to believe and
practice grace

in their own way and time, and God will
be praised.

Recently here in the South, two friends met for breakfast at

the coffee shop.

One was from north of the Mason-Dixon Line,
and when his ham and eggs arrived
he looked twice at his plate and asked the
waitress, "*What is that?*"

She said, "*Grits.*"

He said, "*But I didn't order grits!*"

"Darling, you don't order grits. Grits just comes."

There is more than a small bit of good theology here.

Thanks be to God, we don't order grace. *Grace just comes.*

Fred Craddock has said that "grace is love in action."

Gerald May defines grace as "the active expression of God's love."

Grace is a blessed gift of God,

whose nature and nurture are synonymous with
graciousness,

and whose work of art is to make us gracious,
as well.

The word grace in the New Testament Greek reads *chasis*.
Chasis was a Christianized modification of the Hellenized
greeting of *chairein*.

In other words, early Christians said "Grace and peace"
when they met folks, friends and strangers alike.

You may read in Paul's letters to churches his own words of
greeting or benediction,

saying to the people of God, "Grace and peace."

For example, Paul began his letter to the church in Ephesus
(1:1b-2) by saying,

*"To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ
Jesus:*

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord
Jesus Christ."*

For Paul, even though he used it often, this was never a
routine greeting!

When Paul was a Jew named Saul he vigorously persecuted disciples of Jesus Christ.

He attacked people who said "grace" to all they met without distinction or prejudice.

Paul never forgot that experience.

Paul's memories of his past sins

coupled with his gratitude for the power of God's forgiveness

made his own blessings of grace and peace a miracle every time he said it, ...or anytime any one of us says it.

Paul told his friends how fondly he remembered them and their love,

and how closely he held them in his heart.

"I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,

and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you

as I remember you in my prayers." (Eph. 1: 15-16)

True grace will do this to a person.

True grace transforms us into the kind of people who remember and give thanks.

To say to another person, "Grace and peace"

is to desire God's unlimited, unmerited, generous grace and favor

upon other people.

To say grace and peace to one another

is to testify to the character of God-with-us.

To say to another person, "Grace and peace,"

without distinction or prejudice

is to desire God's unlimited, unmerited, generous grace and favor upon a

neighbor.
Giving thanks and saying grace
are intertwined in the language of our culture and
church.

Another word for communion is Eucharist, which means
thanks giving.

How do you say *thank you* in Spanish?

Rowan Atkinson plays the mime character Mr. Bean.

In a film about Mr. Bean's trip to France,

a Parisian asked him if he wanted cream in his
coffee. "*Oui!*"

"*And would you like sugar?*" "*No.*"

"*You speak wonderful French.*" she said, to which Mr. Bean
answered, "*Gracias!*"

The more grateful we are the nearer we draw to the
embodiment of grace.

Good stewardship of God's many blessings

is rooted in being grateful to the source.

Does it follow that bad stewardship, that greed and
selfishness

are rooted in forgetting the One from whom all things
flow?

Do you think that as we become a more affluent society

we grow more distant from the Doxology?

Are we so full of ourselves and our possessions and our busy-
ness

that we lose track of to whom we owe our gratitude?

Are we moving with and toward God's grace, or running
away?

The grace of God just comes.

We don't order it, but we can sure do our part to spread it
around.

A number of years ago I found myself in a difficult circumstance.

I prayed about it, talked with my support network,
and approached my therapist for advice and counsel.

He said, "*Be grace in graceless situations.*"

I have shared his counsel with many of you in pastoral conversations

and publicly in proclamations of the Good News.

Fred Craddock once said, "*[Above all, I urge you to be grateful.]*

Of all the virtues, if I could have selected just one for my children,

I would have asked God to make them grateful.

People who are genuinely grateful are never greedy or jealous,

never bitter or small; not self-centered or hateful.

If they are able to see every day as a gift from God

and see what they have not as their own,

but as what God has given them for a while,

they are what we call gracious people.

To be gracious, you must first be grateful.

I hope that you are grateful."

Our children in the church are studying the Good Samaritan. Surely this parable is one of Christ's best examples of putting grace into practice.

The Good Samaritan is in the tenth chapter of Luke

Also in the tenth chapter of Luke

we find Jesus in the home of Mary and Martha and their friends and neighbors. Martha is busy cleaning and preparing and serving,

while her sister Mary is busy listening to Jesus.
Jesus had barely sat down to dinner
when suddenly he finds himself in the center of a
family tiff.
Martha asked Jesus to tell her sister to help,
and all eyes looked to their Lord for help.
Methinks this was not the first time Martha's expectation of
Mary's help was denied.
And maybe it wasn't the first time Mary sat down to
contemplate the Son of God
when big sister Martha decided that idle hands are the
devils workshop.

Jesus stopped teaching to seize upon this teachable moment.
He had been blessed with a teachable moment just the
day before.

Jesus was approached by a lawyer, who said,
"Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
Jesus said, *"What is written in the law?"*
The lawyer answered, *"You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart,
and with all your soul, and with all your strength,
and with all your mind;
and your neighbor as yourself."*
Jesus said, *"You have given the right answer; do this, and
you will live."*

But wanting to justify himself the lawyer asked, *"But who is
my neighbor?"*

Jesus told him the story of a man that was beaten and left to
die by robbers,
and then ignored by first a priest and later a Levite.
A Samaritan came by and picked up the hurt stranger and

cared for him,
making sure he was attended.
Jesus then asked the lawyer,
*“Who was neighbor to the man who fell into the
hands of robbers?”*
He said, *“The one who showed him mercy.”*
Jesus said to him, *“Go and do likewise.”*

And now Jesus in the home of Martha and Mary
finds himself before a person filled with so much
doing
she may not have even realized she was in the
presence of God.

When Jesus responds he calls Martha's name not once but
twice:
*“Martha..., Martha, you are anxious and troubled about
many things; one thing is needful.”*

He seeks to break through her distraction and get her
attention.

He allows Martha to see Mary anew; she is a faithful
disciple, not a neglectful host.

He allows Martha to see the value and grace in
her ministry as well.

Disciple Beverly Gaventa points out that *Mary, in listening
to Jesus' word,*

has at least begun where faithfulness begins.

But what does this suggest?

*That the life of contemplation is preferred over the life of
action?*

Hardly.

*Place in your mind this story of Mary and Martha next to
that of the Good Samaritan,*

which is where Luke places them, side by side.

*Mary's place alongside the Samaritan
affirms that discipleship has to do not only with love
of neighbor
but also with love of God,
not only with active service
but also with a silent and patient waiting upon
God's supreme prophet.*

The Samaritan and Mary belong together.

*Doing without listening can easily degenerate into busyness
that loses its purpose.*

*Listening without doing soon becomes no more than a
mockery of the words.*

*In the practice of grace we discover the joy of both doing and
listening,
of reflecting and responding
to the needs of our neighbors
as well as to our own souls.*

*There is a sacred time to go and to do;
there is a sacred time to listen and reflect.
Know when and which is a matter of spiritual discernment.*

*When Jesus arrives at your home tonight,
ask Him whether you should follow the ways of Mary
or the Samaritan.*

His answer will probably be, "Yes."

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!