

Sunday, July 31, 2016

Romans 3:21-24

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

John 1:15-17

Understanding God's Grace

We continue in our summer series with topics chosen by you and specifically today our focus is "Understanding God's Grace". The reality of this topic is that we will not fully understand what God's grace is all about but little by little God's grace is received and realize it through time.

First I wish to share with you this story about God's grace

Operator: "Thank you for calling Pizza Pizzazz. May I have your national ID number?"

Customer: "Hi, I'd like to place an order."

Operator: "May I have your NIDN first, sir?"

Customer: "My National ID Number, yeah, hold on, eh, it's 6102049998-45-54610."

Operator: "Thank you, Mr. Sheehan. I see you live at 1742 Meadowland Drive, and the phone number's 494-2366. Your office number over at Lincoln Insurance is 745-2302 and your cell number's 266-2566. Which number are you calling from, sir?"

Customer: "Huh? I'm at home. Where d'ya get all this information?"

Operator: "We're wired into the system, sir."

Customer: (Sighs) "Oh, well, I'd like to order a couple of your All-Meat Special pizzas."

Operator: "I don't think that's a good idea, sir."

Customer: "Whaddya mean?"

Operator: "Sir, your medical records indicate that you've got very high pressure and extremely high cholesterol. Your National Health Care provider won't allow such an unhealthy choice."

Customer: "What?!?! What do you recommend, then?"

Operator: "You might try our low-fat Soybean Pizza. I'm sure you'll like it."

Customer: "What makes you think I'd like something like that?"

Operator: "Well, you checked out 'Gourmet Soybean Recipes' from your local library last week, sir. That's why I made the suggestion."

Customer: "All right, all right. Give me two family-sized ones, then."

Operator: "That should be plenty for you, your wife and your four kids, sir. Your total is \$49.99."

Customer: "Lemme give you my credit card number."

Operator: "I'm sorry sir, but I'm afraid you'll have to pay in cash. Your credit card balance is over its limit."

Customer: "I'll run over to the ATM and get some cash before your driver gets here."

Operator: "That won't work either, sir. Your checking account's overdrawn."

Customer: "Never mind! Just send the pizzas. I'll have the cash ready. How long will it take?"

Operator: "We're running a little behind, sir. It'll be about 45 minutes, sir. If you're in a hurry you might want to pick'em up while you're out getting the cash, but then, carrying pizzas on a motorcycle can be a little awkward."

Customer: "Wait! How do you know I ride a bike?"

Operator: "It says here you're in arrears on your car payments, so your car got repo'ed. But your Harley's paid up.

Customer: " not too happy—starts to swear"

Operator: "I'd advise watching your language, sir. You've already got a July 2006 conviction for cussing out a cop."

Customer: (Speechless)

Operator: "Will there be anything else, sir?"

Customer: "Yes, I have a coupon for a free 2 liter of Coke".

Operator: "I'm sorry sir, but our ad's exclusionary clause prevents us from offering free soda to diabetics. Thank you for calling Pizza Hut!"

A funny story to be sure but where is grace in this? The pizza company knowing the big picture of their customer responds to the request of the customer and offers different opportunities and answers to the dilemmas the customer shares. The graciousness of the pizza store in looking after the dietary needs of the customer amidst their desire to have something different. And the ungracious response of the customer who swears and becomes angry. Would we call this grace?

One of the twenty articles of faith upon which the United Church of Canada was founded (Article 6) states: "We believe that God out of His great love for the world has given His only begotten Son to be the Saviour of sinners and in the Gospel freely offers His all sufficient salvation to all men (people). We believe also that God, in His own good pleasure, gave to his son a people, an innumerable multitude, chosen in Christ unto holiness, service and salvation.

Grace is action of God for God's people through Jesus's death and resurrection. As we read in the introduction passage of John's gospel, John is telling his story of Jesus. John came as a man sent from God to testify to the one who was to come after him. John and Jesus were relatives through their mothers and John was the oldest yet Jesus being God's Son, was in the world already. But people did not recognize him as God's Son. And so God out of his infinite love for people, sent Jesus to earth to live a human life. Jesus is from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John also gives us reason as to why God sent Jesus. "From the fullness of God's grace—we have received many blessings. Through Moses and his legacy of the people who were once slaves now living in Israel, we received God's laws. But it is through Jesus we receive the blessings of grace and truth. We receive God's Gift of grace.

But what is this 'grace'? It is a free favour of God to save his creatures—people from sin. In Romans 3 we read "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" but there is a way in which we may be reconciled that is find favour with God again. It is by having faith and belief in Jesus the Son and what he did for other people that enables us to have salvation. Jesus is God's Son and in coming to earth his purpose was to save the people from sinful lives, to have people reconciled with God again. But they had to have someone take their position- by dying, descending into death for them. It is through the moment of Jesus' death on the cross which paid the price for our sins. And when it was learned that He was alive again the truth of who he was/is came forward- he is the Son of God. Because he is God- he could rise from death.

As Paul wrote in Romans 3 it is God who presented Jesus as the one who had to die for our sakes in order to demonstrate justice. Prior to this people who had sinned were left unpunished. Through Jesus' death and resurrection all may come to understand that justice was done by God by enabling the innocent one- Jesus- to die instead of people.

Paul also wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made Jesus (the one without sin) to be sin for us so that in him we might be saved." Jesus death and resurrection enabled people to become reconciled with God and receive the gift of eternal salvation. But people still had and have to make this choice- to choose to receive this free and unmerited gift from God. It is yours for the choosing, but you must choose to receive this gift we call grace which leads to eternal salvation. Grace is God's love in action towards people. Grace stands for God's Redemption at Christ's Expense. Through Jesus we are redeemed, forgiven and set free. This is grace.

There are other ideas connected to God's grace. One might hear, "by the grace of God" this means that it is only through God's deep love that you are able to do what you can. It is only by God's grace that you receive gifts and talents. And so it is imperative that you give thanks for these gifts.

Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. But apart from me, you can do nothing. Paul understand this. And his work ethic was a gift of God's grace and he knew it. He say, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of the,, yet not I but the grace of God that was with me." (1 Cor. 15:10) He glorified God because of what he received as God's grace. Sometimes we wonder about this and question whether we even have ever received this grace; or maybe that we probably have never acknowledged it. If we have not acknowledged God's grace to us- maybe it is time- to say Thank you and rejoice. For if you have received the gift of God's grace- you know it and you are safe throughout your life. You will sin, yes, but you also know that you will be forgiven of your sins because you have received God's grace and know Jesus. You are forgiven of sins because you confessed them and received the assurance. "Anyone in Christ is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come." This comes from God so that we might share with others the ministry of reconciliation and with reconciliation-truth, love and hope.

How many of you have seen trapeze artists? They are breathtaking with their dexterity and timing. There seems to be near misses and almost falls and for many, there is a safety net just in case something goes wrong. If this happens, the artists, jump up and bounce back to the trapeze and tries again the movement they did before and the audience is in awe.

As Christians, we live on the trapeze as the whole world can watch and say, "Look how they live, how they love. Look how well they treat each other. Aren't they great workers, best neighbours, friends? Look what they do for others. But what happens when we slip and fall and go against Christ's teachings? Our safety net is there for us- Jesus has provided forgiveness for all those things we might do or slip up. Both the net and the ability to stay on the trapeze are works of God's grace. We might want to just sleep on that net- because it is easier, but the reality is, we are called to better heights to serve God. For by the grace of God we are gifted to wonderful things. We just need to remember this gift this grace and rejoice.

Let us pray