

Sunday March 20 2022 Lent 3 Where is Grace?

I Corinthians 10:1-13 Luke 16:1-13

We continue in our Lenten series focusing on “God’s grace for us all”. One of the most asked questions regarding God and God’s relationship to people is how we define what sets Christianity apart from all other faiths. This question is What is grace? This question asked has many answers depending upon your perspective and yet each answer does not fully respond to the question. So maybe just maybe we need to ask a different question! Where is grace? In order to understand this precious gift from God, we might just take a moment to answer Where is grace?’ How do we define a grace-filled moment?

We often describe ballet dancers filled with grace. Yet as Alice Abram states we must consider what occurred for years prior to a performance. “In life as in dance, grace glides on blistered feet.” This may be contrasted to a young girl as she learns to dance. John Milton states, “Grace was in her steps – heaven in her eyes.” So where do we find grace?

Different theologians have offered many perspectives on grace but where might one truly experience it? Kenneth Callahan writes that “in the every day, ordinary events of life, we experience decisive events that change our lives and shape our destinies. It is in these events, that we experience the grace of God as these are our learnings for living. These learnings come to us in ordinary moments but through them, we discover new possibilities, new feelings, new meanings and new ways forward. Callahan states that one of the key learnings of life, which may be experienced daily is compassion. We are called to live your compassion- for when you do so, you live a life full of joy and wonder, good fun and good times, forgiveness, reconciliation and moving on. When you live with compassion, you claim God’s gift of compassion for you.

Counter to this, if you deny this gift from God in your life, you deny God. Jesus died on the cross, not because it made sense for this to occur, but because of God’s love for us shown in giving us Jesus to die in our place. To hear this story and respond personally means that our hearts have been moved and it may not be logical for this to occur, but because of this warm feeling within, we offer ourselves to others. Callahan states, “Where there is compassion, there is the grace of God.” (Living in Grace, Kenneth Callahan)

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians reminds this young church about the people of Israel and what they endured as they travelled in the desert. For generations, they wandered and even though they ate and drank with Christ following them, God was not pleased with most of them. Paul describes their sins and that they were killed as examples of what not to do.

If you believe and follow God in faith, He will not let you be tested beyond your strength but if you are tested, He will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. This is how much God loves you; how compassionate God is and why God grants us grace. We may sin again and again; but if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us. This is God's grace poured down upon us over and over again.

So where do we find grace? In acts of compassion and love. Maybe you have been witness to this gift of grace recently or did not realize that it was a grace filled moment. Jesus tells the parable of the dishonest manager and we are unsure of what to think about this steward. He has been accused of squandering the property of a rich man. The rich man calls him into account and tells him that he cannot be manager any longer. The manager realizes that he will be fired from his job and is unsure of what to do. He realizes that he is not a strong man and could not work as a labourer, he is too proud and ashamed to be a beggar in the streets or even to seek employment elsewhere. This manager realizes that he needs to do something.

The manager calls the debtors in one by one. The first debtor is asked- how much do you owe my master—100 jugs of olive oil—make it 50 instead (cutting the debt in half). The second debtor is asked, how much do you owe my master? 100 containers of wheat—may it 80 instead.

When the manager and master meet, the master or rich man commends the manager because of his shrewd behaviour. The reasoning behind this? "The children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light." What had the manager done?—he tried to make amends—yes he had squandered his master's property and knew he would be fired; he had compassion on two of the debtors and reduced their bill. As he did this he also made 2 friends where he could be welcomed and lifted up as one who had helped when they were in debt. He had compassion for these debtors and at the same time did receive some of the money owed for his master.

Jesus concludes this story by asking the question- if you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches. If you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? This manager- squandered the wealth of his manager, but at the same time tried to keep two friends whom he knew he would need in the days to come as he had lost his job. Jesus did not excuse the manager's action, but admired his initiative. He had to make a new life for himself and so he takes action. This man is in a crisis and instead of wallowing in self- pity acts resourcefully. Jesus states, "No slave

can serve two master, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

Where is grace in this story? The manager decreased the debt of each of the debtors but was it an act of grace or did he do it to save himself? He knew that he had to make the best of the situation and acted.

As people of faith and followers of Jesus we have heard Jesus calling us to answer his call to follow, to believe and to act in faith. Many people postpone answering this call hoping that Jesus will get tired of waiting and move on to another. But this is not the case. Only Jesus sets people free from this indecision and enables others to experience compassion and where there is compassion, there is grace. And with grace there is hope restored for a better tomorrow.

This manager in Jesus' story lost his job, but kept some dignity through reducing the debt of two people. He had squandered what had been entrusted to him, but left this employer knowing that in the final acts as the manager, he had taken the initiative to do something good.

We too are called to do good in Christ's name. We are to look for the opportunities to do good with God guiding us. But we need to be strengthened in our faith journey to do these actions which bring about change and basic necessities to others. We need to know that what we do will bring hope and how hope will be found as we share our gifts with other.

As we continue in our Lenten journey, we need to be nourished by the Spirit as we remember Christ Jesus and his Passion Story. As we draw closer to Holy Week, we also need to be reminded that God's grace is for everyone- we just need to say yes. So today let us be reminded what Jesus did for us as he asked us to remember him through the sharing of bread and drinking the cup. Let us remember him as one who shared and showed compassion and love. Let us remember that we will experience grace In Christ alone.