

By grace I'm saved, grace free and boundless. Salvation unto us has come, by God's free grace and favor. Lutherans are all about grace. Actually, the Christian faith is all about grace. But what is grace? If someone asked you to define grace, could you do it? Christians talk about grace in practically everything they say and do, but what is it? **Grace is God's favor toward us for Christ's sake.** The Catechism says concerning grace, that it is the fatherly divine goodness and mercy, given to us without any merit or worthiness in me. Grace is God's gracious favor toward us. Grace is undeserved. Contrary to popular belief by certain Christians, grace is not something poured into a Christian in order to help him help God in the work of salvation. That robs Jesus Christ of His glory in His Passion. Grace does not help us find favor with God it is God finding favor with us. With grace, God is doing all the work. Grace is a free gift.

Consider today's Gospel lesson; it is all about grace. The landowner asks two questions to one of the laborers at the end of Christ's parable. The first question: *Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?* Grace is the exclusive property of God. Grace is His merciful and loving attitude toward us sinners through Jesus Christ. We don't deserve God's grace and yet we receive it. What gives us the right to grumble about God's blessings?

Grace moved God to create us out of nothing. The Heavenly Father richly and daily provides us with all that we need to support this body and life. Grace moved God to save us while we were yet sinners. God gives us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in His Son Jesus Christ. He has purchased and won us from sin, death and the power of the devil; with the holy precious blood of Jesus. Yet we whine about not getting enough grace or getting less grace. The fact that we get any grace at all should make us stop and respond with thanks, praise, service and obedience.

Grace delivers forgiveness of sins to us; the forgiveness won by Jesus Christ when He became sin for you in order that we might receive eternal life. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is the once and for all perfect sacrifice, taking our place, enduring the suffering and shame that we deserved. What was once condemned in Adam is now accepted by God in Christ. There can be no grace without Christ's death and resurrection for us sinners.

The second question that the landowner asked is the clincher: *Is your eye evil because I am good?* Remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount about an evil eye? *If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.* In a time when equality among people seems to be the most treasured virtue of all; when it comes to Jesus we find ourselves begrudging a generous, loving God who does not condemn us all to eternal torment in the burning fires of hell. Remember, God the Father so loved the whole world, that He gave His only begotten Son unto death, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. God's grace is the same for all of us.

We gripe about God's relationship toward others and toward each one of us. It's not fair that so-and-so was a Christian for less time than I was, but they receive the same reward as I receive. If this is how you receive God's grace, then you must not care if your loved one, who has rejected Christ for most of their life, at the hour of their death repents of their sins and believes. Whether one is a Christian for the last five minutes of their life or for one hundred years, all those called by God to work in His Vineyard receive the same wage. That wage is

grace. It comes to us by God's gracious favor. The angels of heaven rejoice over the one man who repents.

If we can't appreciate God's grace, we must not be a fan of the spreading the Christian faith to all people. One of the emphases of Pre-Lent, this Gesimatide, is mission work at home and abroad. We are to teach and preach the Word of God in all of its truth and purity that God's name would be kept holy and His kingdom extended. The Heavenly Father desires all of us, His baptized children, to work in His Vineyard for the same reward. His generosity is lavish, perhaps even bordering on being too generous. Only a fool would be so generous to give something away for nothing. Nevertheless, that's the message of the one holy Christian and Apostolic Church. God's grace cost Him dearly. His only-begotten Son died for sin and rose for our justification. In Jesus' innocent suffering and death we have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. It's free. It's for you and me. That is grace. God changed His mind because of His Son Jesus. He now looks at us differently; He looks at us with joy. Adam's fall into sin is cancelled in Christ's atoning blood.

What a wonderful Savior we have! That's the message of mission. The message of mission is the message of grace. This message of grace is proclaimed when and where God wills. This doesn't mean God rolls the dice and decides to whom He will or will not be gracious. It is not given to you to worry about such matters. What matters most is that God is gracious in Jesus Christ. What matters most is that He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of Truth. The fact that our Father in heaven desires this to be so is grace.

God's gracious favor toward us is now revealed through the mission work of the Christian Church. The mission work of the Church is to give all people God's grace. As Lutherans we do that through the means of grace. The means of grace are God's Holy Word and Blessed Sacraments of Baptism, Confession and Absolution and Communion. God gives His grace to us through physical means. God ties Himself to physical things. It is through these things that His gracious attitude is revealed to us. Our nourishment as a Christian under God's grace comes to us from Christ through water, Word, bread, and wine. These are our lifelines. These holy things are how we receive God's grace. They are used to call us to Christ, to join us to Christ, to create faith in us and forgive us our sins. By these things our cup runs over, goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our life and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. As the hymn sings, *The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord; she is His new creation by water and the Word. From heaven He came and sought her to be His only bride; with His own blood He bought her and for her life He died.*

Today and the next two Sundays show us how much we need God's grace. By God's grace we are saved through faith in Jesus Christ. This is not of our own doing, as Saint Paul tells the Church in Ephesus. *It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* As His workmanship, our eye no longer begrudges God's generosity. He gives His grace to all His children when and where He wills. He gives His grace to us in order that we might be His own and live under Him in His Vineyard and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. The Christian faith is all about grace. Where would you be without it? Amen.