

October 29th 2017 500th Anniversary of the Reformation

Scripture:

Psalm 46

Romans 3:21-28

Matthew 22:34-40

Ephesians 2:4-10

“It is by grace you have been saved.”

The nature ---- and to a lesser degree --- the purpose of the church has always been debated over the centuries.

How we should be church? --- Why we should be church?

What the church does --- or ought to do --- how she does it --- or ought to do it ----- has been wrangled with --- debated ----- argued over even ----- century after century ---- after century.

And it continues on today as well.

Some people see the church as like a safe house ---- a sanctuary ---- a place of rest and peace --- a place of uninterrupted and unmitigated continuity year after year after year ---- decade after decade --- century after century.

For others it's more like a school --- where one learns --- and grows --- is taught ---- and perhaps even teaches from time to time --- a place where experience and wisdom and learning --- are shared.

For others church is family ----- it's like a family gathering ---- a kind of party --- a get together celebration week after week and in between from to time as well.

For others it is a holy --- set apart ---- sacred place --- a place all about divine revelation --- and the will of God.

For some it's more like a courthouse --- a place where people are judged --- and harsh lines and rules and laws are upheld.

For some it's mostly just a mystery ----- a place they know nothing or little about.

For most of us ----- it's a combination of many of these --- a place of peace -
-- a place of learning --- a place where family and friends gathers --- a holy
and set apart place --- and often so much more as well.

Church means many things to many people.

But church can't just be any old thing that we want it to be.

Today we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation --- the church
being reformed from the inside out by people like Martin Luther ---- John
Calvin ---- John Knox --- Philip Melanchthon --- Martin Bucer --- Heinrich
Bullinger ---- Jan Hus ---- and a whole cast of others --- all of whom sought
to bring the focus back on God and His glory and grace.

There were things going on in the Church of Jesus Christ that these
reformers --- as they came to be known --- just couldn't live with ----- or
reconcile with their faith in God.

For example the Church was in the process of building St. Peter's Cathedral
in Rome --- and the expense was vast and huge.

Enter in --- the practice of Indulgences.

Indulgences ---- a piece of paper guaranteeing the offender who had
purchased it ----- that whatever sin was listed on it --- was wiped away and
would not block their entry into heaven.

This is how it went ---- so and so --- let's say John as an example --- John ---
- enters into the confessional --- and says to his priest --- "Forgive me father
for I have sinned --- I have stolen an apple off my neighbour's tree on the
way by everyday this week."

The priest replies --- "7 days of stealing apples ----- \$50 my child."

John pays the \$50 --- and on the way out of the church is presented with a
certificate --- an Indulgence that says ---- John has paid for the sin of
stealing apples 7 days in a row from his neighbour --- and so his salvation
and entry into heaven is guaranteed not to be withheld for the sin of apple
stealing.

A fee --- a piece of paper --- an Indulgence ----- for each sin committed.

Money --- paper Indulgences ----- certificates --- were replacing grace.

Something was wrong with the Church --- something was wrong what the Church was doing in with the sale of Indulgences --- grace was being doled out by human beings --- or so they thought.

And something was also wrong with the Church so in year 60 AD ----- when Paul wrote to the Church at Ephesus --- our last reading this morning.

It wasn't Indulgences in 60 AD --- but there were challenges --- and so Paul writes to encourage the Ephesians.

Just as the church faced many divisions when Martin Luther came along making some powerful suggestions so it was when Paul first wrote to the Ephesians.

The Ephesians were being torn up by division and Paul wanted to bring them back together ---- and unite them once again under the central message of salvation in Christ by the grace of God.

“For it is by grace you have been saved ---- through faith --- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift from God...” --- he writes in verse 8.

And the context begins at verse 4 ----

“But because of his great love for us --- God who is rich in mercy --- made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.”

Our salvation is because of one thing and one thing only ---- God's grace ----
----- His undying love for us.

Even as we continually mess things up ---- God falls deeper and deeper in love for us ---- the greater we become lost --- the greater the amount of grace is necessary to lead us home once again to God.

In a sentence the Reformation as a historical movement ----- was a movement of grace.

In a sentence our lives are all about the movement of grace --- the presence of grace ---- God's grace.

People ---- human desires and wants and needs had become the heart of church --- and life --- and faith and not God.

Change was necessary --- reform was necessary --- a radical return to the creator was necessary.

Thankfully every time we fall down --- God comes and picks us up again.

Time and time again --- God sends faithful people to lead us back to the truth --- the Good News of Jesus Christ.

In 1517 God acted through people like Martin Luther ---- John Calvin --- John Knox --- and so on.

They were divine gifts to the church and to the world ---- leading people back to God's will.

In 60 AD God sent another faithful person Paul --- to communities that had become ---- confused --- and disoriented.

And of course most of all ---- God came along in the person of Jesus Christ when things had really fallen into despair.

God's grace always comes just as it is needed --- not a minute too late --- and not a minute early ---- right on time.

In the midst of Church corruption in 1517 ---- God sends agents of grace.

In 60 AD in Ephesus --- God sends an agent of grace.

In our lives today ---- God sends agents of grace.

We are forever blessed with the timely and sufficient gift of grace ---- over and over and over again.

Forget about the Energizer bunny --- it's God that just keeps going --- and going --- and going.

Unfortunately at times --- we either think that God is absent ---- or that if we just work harder we can earn or work our way into God's good books.

The truth is --- we are all already in God's good books.

And the truth is God is already and forever here --- in our midst – in the midst of all that happens in this world.

The story goes that ----- back in the days of the Reformation, Martin Luther was debating with the great humanist Desiderius Erasmus.

And Erasmus described God's grace to Luther this way -----

He -- said that God's grace ----- "...was like a mother helping a baby learn to walk.

She holds the baby's hand, steadies the baby's little body, let's the baby take a few unsteady steps, and then catches the baby when she falls."

---- "a mother helping a baby learn to walk. She holds the baby's hand, steadies the baby's little body, let's the baby take a few unsteady steps, and then catches the baby when she falls."

To which the great martin Luther said ----- "No. --- No. ----- No --- God's grace isn't like that at all."

And with the bluntness that so often characterized him ----- Luther said ---- "God's grace ----- is like a caterpillar surrounded by a ring of fire.

And God reaches down and plucks the helpless creature from certain death."

"God's grace ----- is like a caterpillar surrounded by a ring of fire.

And God reaches down and plucks the helpless creature from certain death."

That's grace --- according to Luther.

God reaching down and plucking us from the hands of death.

When we are surrounded by a ring of fire ----- God reaches down and plucks us from the hands of death.

That's what we're celebrating every Sunday as we gather in His name and celebrate His goodness --- and grace --- and love.

As one theologian said ----- We are all really good at singing ---- “Amazing Grace” --- but we live “Trust and obey.”

We are all really good at singing Amazing Grace ----- but unfortunately we too often live trust and obey.

Yes we are to trust and obey --- but it is God’s grace that saves us not our obedience or our trust --- it’s not about us --- it’s about Him.

And one of the great comforts in life is ----- “The deeper the trouble ----- the deeper the grief ---- the deeper the suffering ---- the deeper the pain ---- the deeper the grace.”

There is no depth that grace cannot enter into.

The Good News of Jesus Christ ----- is that grace trumps trouble ---- and grace trumps grief --- and grace trumps suffering --- grace trumps everything.

As Luther said ---

“God’s grace is like a caterpillar surrounded by a ring of fire.
And God reaches down and plucks the helpless creature from certain death.”

In Christ --- on the Cross ----- God reaches down --- and plucks us from sins ring of fire ---- from certain death.

We don’t deserve it.

We haven’t earned it.

We can’t even really understand it.

But when we cut through all the burdens and barriers of this life ---- all we are truly left with is God’s grace.

All the rest is fleeting ---- our money ---- our looks --- our great voice or great athletic ability ----- whatever it is ---- it all washes away like words written in the sand on the beach --- gone -- washed away in an instant.

But not God’s grace.

We're going to take a few minutes now in the quietness of our hearts ---- to reflect on grace --- God's great love for us.

Listen to the music --- look at the images on the screen --- close your eyes -- -- close your ears --- open your heart --- doodle reflect in the bulletin ---- there's space there today

do whatever it is that God leads you to do ----- but focus on God's saving grace.

“For it is by grace you have been saved ---- through faith --- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift from God...”

After a time we'll be brought back together ---- for now it's grace.

“For it is by grace you have been saved ---- through faith --- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift from God...”