

2/10/2019

“Caught By Grace”

Scripture: Luke 5:1-11; Isaiah 6:1-8; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Theme: The word of God catches us by grace, to give us new life, and calls us to follow Jesus.

Today is the Sunday before Valentine’s Day. You may have read my newsletter message for February relating to both the romantic and emotional aspect of love, and know of the stories behind the martyrdom of one or more priests named Valentine, during the time of the Roman Empire. If not, you may want to check it out online.

And if you were here last Sunday, you may recall my message about Christ’s love . . . the most excellent way to live. You can find it on our church website if you missed it.

Today, I want to take a look at a related by-product of that love or God’s love. That by-product, aspect or gift is grace.

Our appointed scripture readings for today all speak of God’s grace and what happened to those who received it.

† **Isaiah, Peter, and Paul all experienced God’s grace in different ways.**

† **That grace transformed their lives.**

† **They responded by sharing that word of grace to others.**

First, the prophet Isaiah, who lived about 700 years before Jesus. He lived during the decline of Israel in the shadow of the powerful Assyrian Empire.

In Isaiah 6 (vs.1-8) we read of a marvelous vision which he had.

*In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another: “**Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.**” ⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ⁵ “**Woe to me!**” I cried. “**I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.**”*

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, **“See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”** ⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, **“Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”** And I said, **“Here am I. Send me!”**

In his encounter with God, Isaiah acknowledged his sin. And in his repentance was caught by God’s grace and given atonement for his sin. Then, freed and restored, he responded to God’s call to go and serve the Lord.

The gospel of Luke records how Simon, a fisherman who was later called Cephas or Peter by Jesus, encountered Jesus.

Luke 5:1-11 NIV

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. ² He saw at the water’s edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.” ⁵ Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”

⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s partners.

¹¹ Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.” So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

We see Peter from his human perspective. He may have felt tired, and perhaps honored, for Jesus to request to use his boat to sit and teach as a rabbi would to the crowds that were gathered around him to hear the word of God.

But then, after finishing teaching the crowds, Jesus asks Peter to put out to deep water and let down his nets for a catch. Notice Peter’s honest reply . . . *“Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”* Because you say so, I will.

And, can you imagine how Peter must have felt when suddenly they caught so many fish in their nets that they couldn't handle them all?! After getting the help he needed from others, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; for I am a sinful man!"

Notice again God's grace at work. Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." And the response of Peter and the others with him -- they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

And finally, Paul, who was first known as Saul of Tarsus, who had been persecuting followers of Jesus. He had a close encounter with the resurrected Christ. After having ascended to heaven, Jesus returned to meet Saul, who was on his way to Damascus to round up and bring followers of Jesus back to Jerusalem for trial.

Because of that encounter with Jesus, who did not retaliate against Paul, but extended God's love with mercy and grace, Paul would go on to be an even greater missionary to the gentiles -- those not of his own faith -- sharing the good news of Jesus with people of many nations and cultures.

Listen to his testimony (1 Corinthians 15:1-11) . . .

"Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve 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 to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them — yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. ¹¹ Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed."

Saul of Tarsus was caught by grace. His life was forever transformed by God's grace. His name was a reflection of that transformation as Simon Peter's was. And, he responded by sharing that word of grace to others.

I could share my testimony of God's grace with you today. But, let me share just one other of someone I haven't seen in several years. He's a man named Jim. Jim came to mind again as I was preparing today's message, because Jim loved to fish. That wasn't his profession, but a relaxing hobby he learned from his grandfather.

Jim is a great commercial artist. He has done building murals for businesses, as well as smaller projects. But as an adult, Jim also became an alcoholic. One day he found himself living under a bridge in Chester, PA. Somehow, he found his way into Cityteam, a nondenominational Christian nonprofit compassionately serving the poor, the homeless, and the lost in several cities on the west coast, as well as Chester, PA.

Since 1957, Cityteam has been serving people in extreme poverty and helping them transform their lives, their families and their communities. Their programs vary to meet the needs of the communities they serve.

Cityteam's Men's Program is a residential, Christ-centered, holistic program which empowers men to transform their broken lives. Along with Jim getting into recovery and on his feet again, he became an active church member.

Jim was caught by grace. His life was transformed.

While I was at Norwood UMC, Jim attended church with us. He shared his story with me and others. He invited and encouraged us to help serve meals to the residents of Cityteam and others who came from the area every night for a meal. Some also came early for the short chapel service that was led by the visiting church servers before the meal.

Jim also felt called to use his gift and passion of fishing as a way to connect with others of all ages and share the good news of Jesus Christ with others in a conversational way. I encouraged Jim to start the River of Life Fishing Ministry, which is still there.

Jim has also used his professional artistic gifts at both Norwood UMC and Cityteam.

Jim would be the first person to tell you it was, and still is, all by the grace of God.

Friends . . .

How have you encountered God? . . . Jesus?

What did you think, and how did you feel, about your encounter?

How have you experienced God's grace in your life? What difference has it made? How have you responded to it?

I truly hope that you have been caught by grace and set free for new and abundant life in Christ! I hope each of you can say with me as Paul said . . . ***“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain!”*** (1 Corinthians 15:10a)

In Jesus' name, Amen!