

SOLA: Sola Gratia

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As you already know, Sola is our theme for this year's mid-week Advent services. Sola, as our bulletin explains, means only or alone. We have learned that the only way to know about God and the things of the Christian faith is Sola Scriptura, by Scripture alone. And Sola Fide, by faith alone is how a person is saved.

Today, we will affirm that all this is Sola Gratia, or by grace alone.

What exactly is grace. We could let Webster define grace for us, but we are not talking about "the simple elegance of refined movement." Instead, let us define grace as God defines it through Paul's pen, as such, it is simply a gift.

What is a gift? Are your wages a gift? No, you earn them by the sweat and toil of your body and mind. If you are retired, are your social security benefits, your pension, and other things a gift? No! Again, you earned them by your years of employment.

As we approach Christmas, we talk and think quite a bit about gifts. Hopefully you will get that Christmas bonus. But is it a gift? Let's face, you think you deserve that bonus, and it better be a decent bonus, after all, you have busted your hump all year. They better show their appreciation. See, you are not expecting a bonus as a gift, but because you have worked hard and earned it.

What about the presents that will be tucked under the tree with your name on them. Are they earned? No, you did not earn them. But, you probably receive them because you are part of the family. Everybody gets gifts because they are part of the family. But when you open the gifts you receive, yours better not be worth less than your brother's. If it is, then you will know that it is true, your parents always favored him over you.

Or maybe you receive a gift because someone drew your name out of a hat, and to be honest, your name was not the name they were hoping to get.

Are these things gifts? How do you try and repay them? How did they come to be yours? While some of the presents might be close to pure gift, something given to you which you in no way, shape, or form deserved; you get them because you are part of the family or for some other reason. Even in a gift exchange, you have to put a gift in the kitty to receive one. I do not ever remember received a gift from a complete stranger.

Even at Christmas there is usually a reason "why" we get the presents that we receive from others.

God's grace is completely different. In fact, it is so different that many push back against it. Many are those who try to come up with a reason for why God grace chose them, or at least a reason why God's grace continues to work on them.

It is our sinful human nature to find the reason for why God does what He does for us in ourselves. We want to believe we have earned it, or that somehow we deserve it. We like to think that it is given to us because we are at least better than our really, really, really bad neighbors.

God's grace is the giving of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. What we do not want to admit is the greatest truth. Even while we were enemies of God, rebelling against Him, and doomed for eternal destruction according God's own rules, He sent His Son to save. And dear friends, we are all enemies of God, we live more according to our sinful human nature which rebels against God, and by rights, earns us only His wrath and punishment.

God's gift was given to the shepherds on that Judean hillside, "unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." As the angels proclaimed in song, this gift is peace on earth goodwill from God toward men. It is sola gratia, it is God's gracious gift of forgiveness, wrapped in swaddling clothes. That gift fully given when Christ's innocence is unwrapped, beaten, abused, nailed to a cross, and dies. Sola Gratia is in fact Sola Christo – God's gracious gift is Christ alone.

There is nothing in us that is deserving of this gift of God's love. In fact, the opposite is true. God's grace is given because we are lost and condemned without the gift. There is no "why" to be found. When we examine ourselves, there is nothing in us but sin and death. There is nothing in use that is worthy of being saved. If it were, there would be no grace.

So then, why did God do it? Why did He send His Son to die? Why did God raise Him from the dead? Why does His Spirit come in the Word and work faith in those who hear it? Why does the Baptism miraculously forgive sin and work faith? Why does Christ attach His body which was pierced to the bread that we eat? Why does Christ give us His very blood which was shed for our forgiveness to drink, sacramentally untied to the wine? In order that we might be saved Sola Christo, by Christ alone.

All this was done Sola Gratia, by grace alone. All these are God's gifts to us for the purpose of redeeming sinners, finding the lost, bringing life to those who were dead. This is God's grace which gives to us Jesus. This is the active love of God in the person of Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation.

Our Gospel lessons expresses it well. *And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.*

It is sola gratia, solely by grace, as an underserved gift, for God did not have to do anything for us. There was no obligation on his part. And yet, the very Word of God took on human flesh for us, He is full of grace and truth – He is solely the gift of God in human flesh and the truth of God in human flesh.

In the fulness of time, at the right time, when it was ripe for Him to come into the world so that His perfect life would be put to death, then we receive grace upon grace – we receive gift upon gift. We prepare to celebrate the coming of the Christ Child, the Son of God who was born without sin, lived without sin, and for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, scorning it's shame, to purchase forgiveness of sins.

Sola gratia, by grace alone, Christ is grace upon grace – He is gift upon gift, upon gift, upon gift.

Sola gratia, as a free gift alone, He called you by name, and through water and the Word united you to His death and resurrection that you might have forgiveness and life.

Sola gratia, as a free gift alone, the forgiveness He purchased is spoken into you ears, that you might live in peace and hope.

Sola gratia, as a free gift alone, He gives you His body to eat and His blood to drink, the very gift of Himself that He might fill you, that He might make His dwelling within you, and you might be in Him.

Sola gratia, by grace alone, Jesus Christ is gift, upon gift, upon gift, compounded. He is the grace of God who came to redeem, He is the grace of God who comes to strengthen you, and He is the grace of God who will come again to take you home to be with Him forever. Sola Gratia – by grace alone!

All thanks be to God for the riches of His grace, granted to us in Christ Jesus. Sola Gratia is Sola Christo, God's grace in Christ alone, that we might be granted life eternal! Amen.

