

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – C- 2019
Jer. 1.4-5,17-19 /// 1 Cor. 12.31-13.3 /// Luke 4.21-30

→many students fail or score poorly on a difficult college exam...the professor surprises the class with the announcement that everyone's grade will be scaled upward by at least two letter grades, leaving no one with a grade lower than a "C", and most with "A's"

→the announcement is greeted with gasps of unexpected joy as the students looming failure has now been turned into undeserved success

→that..... is amazing grace!

→[or picture this] ...an aging father and CEO with only one son, who is the presumed heir to the family's fortune, announces to the company board of directors that he is adopting a child from a Third World country

→now both of these children will share equally in the ownership and leadership of the company when he passes away

→....a child destined to a life of poverty **is now** suddenly heir to a fortune....and in a position to help spread wealth to many others

→we would call that.....amazing grace!

→[one more] there is a hard fought playoff among eight teams resulting in a championship game between the top two teams and an eventual winner and champion.

→however....because the games have been so close and the level of competition and sportsmanship so strong.....the Board of Governors who oversees the league decides to break tradition and award championship trophies to all eight teams, declaring the season an eight-way tie!

→now some might call that.....amazing grace!

→stories about the reversal of fortunes are great stories....the surprising and unmerited grace that reverses failure into success....creates sons out of orphans...winners out of losers...all tug at our heart strings

→...we love these stories like this...especially when we can identify with those who needed the a good grade to pass, or the orphaned child who suddenly becomes the heir to a fortune, or the teams who were eliminated in the playoffs

PAUSE

→but what if we identify ourselves with the one student who studied hard and made an A on the exam without the benefit of the generous professor?

→.....or the child who spent their entire life in obedience and hard work at the father's business only to find, at the last moment, that they now have to share equally with someone else....or if you played your heart out on the field and your team won the championship but now you have share the trophy and accomplishment with others.....

→AMAZING GRACE FOR SOME....can feel like ANNOYING GRACE for others

→well it is this type of tension that is on display in our Gospel reading today from Saint Luke.

→Jesus preaches his first public sermon in front of his home synagogue in Nazareth....

→and you would think....this would be a home-field advantage for him....an ideal setting for a homerun homily before adoring fans.....

→but only after a few paragraphs....the hometown congregation turns on Jesus....the cheers turn into "boo's"...and the worship service becomes a lynching party

→how could this happen...who could be against Jesus...especially in his own hometown?

→[as we hear] Jesus finishes reading from the prophet Isaiah...he sits down to expound on the text...saying that Isaiah's prophecy is being fulfilled right in front of their very eyes...on that very day

→and what happens next....they take offense at his authority....they begin to question his kinship to the great prophet Isaiah....

→and this amazing teacher...now becomes annoying to them

PAUSE

“today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” doesn't go over too well

→and to make matters worse, Jesus uses two examples to illustrate his point further.

→the widow at Zarephath during in the days of Elijah...and the healing of Naaman during the days of Elisha

→likewise, Saint Paul, in today's second reading....cuts right to the core of the issue, when he writes about what the essentials of loving is all about

→and so.....when Jesus begins to apply this biblical truth to everyday life, when Jesus begins to challenge his listeners,

→their admiration of him turns to resentment

→their acceptance turns to rejection

→and he is unwelcomed and unwanted by his own people

→[and] w/in an instant ///// J. becomes unworthy and unacceptable....PAUSE

→[in reality] like so many today....it is often easy to assume that **God's favor to us** is a sign of **God's favoritism**....

→that being chosen by God.....presumes that others are not chosen at all

→and this way of thinking...causes us to miss the whole meaning of grace...the meaning of God's love for us...because you see...grace [God's love] is never a possession...but rather it is a gift

→and nor is grace [God's love] cheapened or reduced when it is extended to someone else.

→instead...it is like the fire shared from one candle to another...leaving both candles equally aflame with light and warmth

→i.o.w. there is enough of God's grace...God's love for everyone

→and as Paul concludes/////this type of love.....the love God has for you and me.....the "unconditional love of God"is a love that never fails no matter what we do or say, no matter what we are or become

----it is a love that is genuine and real...freely given....total and complete

PAUSE

→but this is a hard to grasp...especially when we so often think in terms of "insiders" and "outsiders"...it was hard for the first listeners of Jesus and equally difficult today among us as well....

→recall how often this was exactly the problem the people had with Jesus almost every time he spoke or did something...///...when those who thought they had received God's favor wanted to limit it to themselves rather than allowing it to be freely given and shared with others.

→...the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the healing of the Ten Lepers, the anointing of Jesus' feet by the sinful woman, the conversion of Zaccheus, the conversion of the thief on the cross.

→in each case, someone was annoyed that the mercy and love of God...was being extended in ways that stretched beyond conventional boundaries...

→a God who accepts "insiders" like us feels amazing...but a God who seeks and saves "outsiders" was annoying to the people at the time of Jesus...and sometimes that is case with us as well.

PAUSE

→that day in Nazareth...the crowd wanted to run Jesus out of town, rather than widen the circle of God's love to include everyone

→the older brother preferred to miss out on the party thrown by the Father for the younger brother's return....some preferred to turn away rather than make room at the table for Zacchaeus, the sinful woman, the Samaritan leper and the dying thief.

→[and yet] wouldn't it be beneficial for us to learn from their mistakes

→[to cherish that amazing grace that comes forth in the face of fairness and justice...that redraws our tight circles into an ever-widening ring of acceptance and tolerance?....]

→the words of Saint Paul....and the actions of Jesus, do not simply celebrate GOD's love for us....they challenge us on how to start acting as people and how to behave towards one another...with amazing grace.

→...the Lord's table has been set once again for us....and there is always room to pull up another chair....for someone in need

→in the end....all that's left now...is for us to say "grace"