

Trinitarian Congregational Church
Take Out
September 20, 2020

Announcements

Prelude: "God is My Shepherd." Traditional Pianist: Lynne Walker
[Video - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dRDzO_V4uc]

Call to Worship

Leader: The glory of God fills the place where God's people gather;
let us respond together to God's mighty power.

**People: God, who showed mercy to our ancestors, meets us now;
we will celebrate God's presence with us.**

Leader: Remember again the wonderful works of God;
rejoice in the abundance of God's steadfast love.

**People: God has blessed us beyond all deserving;
how wonderful it is to experience God's grace.**

Leader: Consider before God your life as Christ's disciples;
come to worship and serve the one true God.

**People: We will honor God with our words and work.
We hail the God of life and grace.**

Gathering Prayer

Loving, compassionate God, the good news of your grace lifts us once again into your presence. We celebrate your mercy, even as we are awed by its mystery. We long to live according to the realm of heaven, even as we are confounded by your claims. Knowing your gracious love, help us to freely love others. Hearing your call to service, help us bear its sacrifice. Honoring the gift of your community, help us to be faithful members. Meet us in this hour to teach us and lead us in your holy ways. Amen.

Gloria Patri

Scripture

Psalm 145:1-10

¹ I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.

² Every day I will bless you,
and praise your name forever and ever.

³ Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
his greatness is unsearchable.

- ⁴ One generation shall laud your works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts.
- ⁵ On the glorious splendor of your majesty,
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.
- ⁶ The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed,
and I will declare your greatness.
- ⁷ They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness,
and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.
- ⁸ The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- ⁹ The LORD is good to all,
and his compassion is over all that he has made.

Matthew 20:1-16

¹ “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; ⁴ and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. ⁵ When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. ⁶ And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ ⁷ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ ⁸ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ ⁹ When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ¹⁰ Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹ And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹² saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ ¹³ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Special Music: “Praise Ye the Lord” Chris Harris and Lynne Walker
Franz Joseph Haydn. Arr. Nathan J. Arnold.
[Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQfjgMcPK0A>]

Sermon Living With Grace

Life is filled with all kinds of people! Some good and some bad. Have you ever known a person that you found difficult to be around? Perhaps a family member, a neighbor, or even someone here in the church.

Rev. Justin Fisher once told the story of his great aunt Grace who didn't quite live up to her name. He hated when she came to visit his family because she would always end up fighting with his grandmother like "cats and dogs". To make matters worse, for a strict Methodist family, Aunt Grace

was considered to be a big sinner. She had been divorced (at least once), drank an occasional beer, smoked and cussed. As his grandmother used to say when Aunt Grace's visit had mercifully come to an end, "Grace can be difficult at times."

That statement says a mouthful. And I do not just mean a difficult old woman. Grace, as we know it, as unmerited kindness, can also be difficult at times. Grace can be a difficult gift to give and grace can be difficult to receive.

I'll bet the disciples thought so too the first time they heard Jesus tell them the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. Jesus tells them a ridiculous story about a man who has a job, more than likely a big, expensive job, and then pays everyone a flat rate. Those who work hard all day, get their reward. But then those who did so much less get the same reward. And at the end the owner asks the inane question "Are you jealous of my generosity?"

"Well...yes", I want to answer (and I bet the disciples did too). Truth be told I am a bit jealous of such generosity. Jealous because for the life of me it smacks of being unfair. What about that puritan work ethic thing, what about seniority, what about our "just due". Hey! What about me! This story flies in the face of everything I have been taught. But then it is not a story about what I have been taught. It's a story about grace. And, to quote Justin Fisher's grandmother, "Grace can be difficult at times..."

Now don't get me wrong. I don't mind it when God is generous with me. When he's extra generous with loving me in spite of my shortcomings, then I'm all for grace. I love it when God plants a big surprise in my life that eases my heavy burdens, or rewards me unexpectedly with a gift that comes out of nowhere! I especially love it when God smooths over a disaster that I didn't even see coming. And I don't even mind it when God is generous to you, too- as long as he doesn't overdo it, of course. After all -- fair is fair.

But what bothers me about God's grace, is when I sense that God is being more gracious to you than he has been to me. And, especially when I sense that God expects me to be as generous as He is, especially towards those I don't feel deserve it. Oh! Grace can be difficult at times.

You know what I am talking about, don't you. It can be difficult to understand that God loves the pregnant high school girl, as much as he loves the morally, upstanding girl who's never gotten into trouble and the good clean boyfriend too. It can be difficult to grasp that God is as concerned about the neighbor who never goes to church as much as he is about those who never miss a Sunday. It can be painful to acknowledge that God loves uniformed officers as much as he loves Black Lives Matter protestors. It can be terrible to realize that God loves the Wall Street tycoons as much as he loves the struggling worker.

Yes!!!! Grace can be difficult at times. In fact it is, as Paul said, scandalous! Grace is scandalous because it flies in the face of everything we assume to be right and fair. We operate in a world that says rewards go to those who earn it, honor is for those who have status, and power is reserved for those of importance. But grace, God's grace, is not about us, what we do or don't do, what we have or who we are. Grace is about God; God's character, God's honor, God's love.

That is the way of grace. It does not care if you are rich or poor, black or white, republican or democrat. Grace doesn't even care if you are righteous or unrighteous. Grace reminds us that God's kindness, God blessings and even God's salvation is not something to be earned but is something freely

given. Grace is there ready to redeem us and bless us, renew us and transform us. Grace is always there because there is nowhere we can stray from God's love or concern. Grace can be difficult at times; but when we catch the truly amazing nature of grace changes us forever.

Corrie ten Boom was a Holocaust survivor of a terrible camp. Years later she became a famous Christian writer and speaker. At one of her events she was approached by a man who had been one of the most cruel guards at Ravensbruck. He reached out his hand to her and thanked her for her message of forgiveness, and then he said to her “will you forgive me?” Corrie shares her response this way:

I stood there—I whose sins had again and again been forgiven—and could not forgive. Betsie had died in that place. Could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking? It could have been many seconds that he stood there—hand held out—but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I ever had to do . . . I had to do it—I knew that. “Jesus, help me!” I prayed silently.

As I reached out my hand to the former guard, a current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. “I forgive you, brother!” I cried. “With all my heart!” . . . I had never known love so intensely, as I did then. But even then, I realized it was not my love . . . It was the power of the Holy Spirit.

That, my friends, is the very heart of grace. Yes, Grace can be difficult to understand at times. But then, we don't need to understand it, we just need to receive it. And then we need to live it and share it. That is the way it is in the kingdom of God. To live in the stunning, scandalous grace of God that is his gift to us. To live alongside others with the same amazing grace poured out to them- that is the privilege of being the children of God's kingdom. To offer this scandalous gift to those in need of such grace is the mission of the church. To celebrate together, both high and low, first and last, that glorious, scandalous grace of God is our true worship!

Don't you think God's grace is amazing?!

Amen.

Musical Reflection “There's a Wideness in God's Mercy.”
[Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xA63m0iUTk4>]

Joys and Concerns

As you meet with God in prayer, please lift up the joys and concerns shared through the Trumpet Blast. God is eager to be your help and strength, to listen to you and meet your needs. Prayer is a gift we can always use.

Prayers of the People

O Lord, wondrous God, we thank you and praise you for the abundant, marvelous, inexhaustible nature of your grace. We thank you for Jesus Christ who came to offer to us your gifts of forgiveness, restoration and wholeness. We thank you for your Spirit, who journeys with us,

teaching us to live in the grace we need for ourselves and for others. And so, because we know the resources of your grace, we come before you now asking for your blessing, guidance and power.

We pray, Loving God, for your church and for this congregation. Grant us a deeper awareness of your grace, that we may celebrate your goodness and become a living, loving examples of your favor. May the mercy we have received lead us to offer others that same grace; that all peoples may be built up and your name may be glorified.

We pray, Sovereign God, for all who labor for the welfare of the world. Grant your grace, wisdom and compassion to all our leaders, as they seek to bring justice and peace to the nations. And grant your people courage and strength that we may labor faithfully to make your kingdom a reality among us all.

We pray, Merciful God, for all who seek your blessing this day. Grant your justice to the forsaken and your goodness to the disadvantaged. Grant your mercy to the repentant and your compassion to the faithful. Grant also your healing to the ill, your comfort to the mourning, and your provision to the needy. We especially lift up.... And grant us, who have known your abundant loving-kindness, the faith and grace to be your servants here in our community and throughout our world.

We praise you, Glorious God, for all your grace towards us, through Jesus Christ who taught us to pray...

The Lord's Prayer (sins)

Offering

We know the wonderful, abundant grace of God that surrounds us. And we know God's call to reflect his goodness and generosity. Our giving is a part of our response. Let us now offer our gifts with thanks. Let us pray.

You have given us so much O God, and we are awed and humbled by your grace. You invited us to share your abundance with joy, and so we offer these gifts as a reflection of your wondrous ways. Use them for the good of our neighbors and for your glory. Amen

Doxology

Common Commission

Let us go forth into the world in peace, being of good courage, holding fast to that which is good, rendering to no one evil for evil, strengthening the faint-hearted, supporting the weak, helping the afflicted, honoring all persons, loving and serving the Lord, and rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Benediction

Go now into the world

entrusted to God's care and commended to the message of his grace.

Through this you will be built up and given all the blessings God has for his people.

Acts 20:32, alt.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

Postlude:

“Let There Be Peace on Earth,”
Sy Miller and Jill Jackson.

Pianist: Lynne. Walker

[Video - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ia5f1qD_zRQ]