



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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Wesleyan (United Methodist) Theology The Theology of God's Grace *Prevenient Grace*

⁷ *Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? Ps 139:7 NRSV*

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." ⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; Gen 12:1-4a NRSV

Some years ago, a boy in Kentucky sat outside a school and shot some teachers and his fellow students with a high powered rifle. There was no reason for the crime, other than the sickness that ate at the boy's soul.

When the boy was brought into Court for the first time, his father was there, standing by his side. When questioned by the press, the father said that he was sick at heart over what had happened. He wept for the people his son had wounded and killed and the families he had destroyed. He hated what his son had done. Then the man said, "But understand, this is my son. I love him more than life and I will stand by him."

Unearned, undeserved, unconditional love. This is a type of love that can even push its way into a sick and troubled mind. The love of this father for his son is a shadow of what we describe as God's love. God's love for creation is an unearned, unconditional love that has the power to transform our existence. It is this love that we call God's Grace.

When people talk about God's grace they usually speak of God's forgiveness. One is left with a vision of a stern parent accepting a wayward child back even though there is no reason for doing so. God's grace includes forgiveness. The problem with that vision of Grace, however, is that it's very passive. Yet, scripture speaks of God's grace as much more.

In 1977 George Lucas captivated the world with the movie Star Wars. Lucas created a fantasy world in a galaxy far, far away and captured our imaginations. A prominent theme of Star Wars was belief in a force that surrounded all creation and that could influence creation. The famous line from Star Wars was, “The Force be with you.”

Methodists, from the time of Wesley, have spoken of God’s grace in much in the same way. We confess our faith that the grace of God, that force of God’s unconditional love, surrounds us every moment of every day. We also confess that God’s grace is the way we experience God and the way that God acts in our lives and in the world around us. Instead of saying, “The Force be with you,” we say “God’s grace be with you.”

The Three Natures of Grace

As Wesley looked at scripture, and examined his own experience of God’s Grace, he saw that God’s grace worked in at least three distinct ways. First, he saw that God, through God’s grace, was constantly reaching out to the world. God does not sit off on a mountaintop, waiting for us to approach, but instead moves among us, seeking us out. He is making us aware of our need for God in our lives. Wesley called this the grace that goes before God, or the **Prevenient** grace of God.

Once we are aware of God, and our need for God, we also become aware of the ways we have sinned against God and the ways we have failed to love God and one another. Like that boy in Kentucky listening to his father, we hear God saying that God loves us, but we are all too aware of our sins. It is here that the **Justifying** Grace of God enters in. If we respond to God’s grace, by repenting, turning our lives toward God by accepting Christ, God pardons our sins and gives us new Birth through the spirit.

Finally, God’s grace works in our lives, helping us to be the Body of Christ; helping us to live as God would have us live as well as helping us to recapture the image of God that scripture says is part of our make-up. That is the **Sanctifying** grace of God. We experience the sanctifying grace of God as we gather to worship; as we pray; as we share in the sacraments; as we minister to one another.

Over the next few weeks, we will consider the nature of the grace of God that surrounds us always. This is the grace that works in our lives. This week we will look at the Prevenient grace of God, the grace that seeks us out.

Prevenient Grace

God is always with us, every moment of everyday. Like the father of the young man in Kentucky, God does not desert us, no matter what we do. The love of God that seeks us out is the Prevenient grace of God.

The story of the calling of Abraham is a story of Prevenient grace. Abraham was in a far land, and had, he thought, come to the end of his days. Yet, in this far land, God sought out Abraham. “Collect your family and your belongings and go to the land that I will show you.” God sought out Abraham and called him.

This is a faith claim central to all we believe. God calls to us and invites us to follow. The God that created the universe, that created all there is to see and experience, who created all we haven’t yet discovered, cares enough about us that God seeks us out. God cares enough about us that God not only seeks us out but calls us to live as God would have us live. What it means to live as God desires is something that is fleshed out in later scripture. But, this story of the call of Abraham affirms the faith claim that God seeks us out.

Reflect for a moment on what that means for your life. Have you ever felt apart from God? Somehow outside of God's reach? You wanted to find God but didn't know where to turn? What we confess is that you don't have to find God because God is always there. That God is seeking you. Sometimes all you need do is stop and look up. Lock yourself away in a room and you might find that God is not only knocking on the door, but has a skeleton key. The prevenient grace of God seeks us out wherever we are and calls us to follow God.

The prevenient grace of God also convinces us of the existence of sin in our lives. That's a hard one for us. No one likes to be called a sinner, let alone be told that they need God in their life because of their sin. It's like feeling great and the doctor telling you are you are really sick. And often the way we talk about Christ reflects our belief that we don't really need Christ in our lives. We talk about Christ like a close friend. People ask, "Do you know Jesus?" like they were asking, "Do you know Michael Jordan," a celebrity. Think about the old song, "What a Friend we have in Jesus." Or "In the Garden" with the chorus "He walks with me and talks with me." I love these old songs, but they talk about our need for Christ as a friend. Everybody needs friends, after all.

The prevenient grace of God convinces us of our need for Christ in our lives in order to truly live. Yes, Christ is my friend. Christ is my friend the same way that air is my friend. Without air, there is no life. Without Christ, there is no life.

The prevenient grace of God convinces us of our need for Christ. Consider the story of Nicodemus. Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews, seeks Jesus out apparently feeling that something is missing in his life. He comes seeking Jesus in the night. Jesus says to him, "You are a leader of the people and you do not understand things of the spirit? How can you lead?" Nicodemus continues to follow after Christ until, in the closing chapters of the Gospel of John, he comes to tend Jesus in the grave. Nicodemus, by the end of the Gospel, has been convinced of his need for Christ.

Like Nicodemus we often come to Christ in the night, in the dark times of our lives. When our greed has buried us in things; when our hate has isolated us and hurt the people we love; when our indifference to the suffering of others has frozen our hearts, we find ourselves in the dark. It is then that the prevenient Grace of God can work in our lives, convincing us that we really do have a problem with sin and convincing us that we really do need Christ in our lives.

Conclusion

It's all about the Grace of God. The grace of God is a power for transformation in our lives and in the world. God's prevenient Grace is the presence of God that seeks us out wherever we lock ourselves away, no matter where we go. And it is God's prevenient grace that convinces us, that convicts us, of the sin in our lives and convinces us that we need Christ. Know that the Grace of God is with you always.

The Poverty and Justice Bible

The Poverty & Justice Bible is a bible that highlights each passage of scripture that deals with the issues of poverty and justice. There are more than 2000 references in scripture to poverty and justice, as opposed to four or five on such controversial subjects as homosexual acts or marriage. Yet many Christians seem to think that helping the poor is a pointless and even harmful act. As an on-going part of this newsletter, I will be providing citations to passages from the Old and New Testaments each week that deal with what scripture tells

us about poverty and justice. If you are interested in learning more about *The Poverty & Justice Bible* you can check on Amazon.com or go to www.Justicebible.org.

¹ *Please help the king
to be honest and fair
just like you, our God.*
² *Let him be honest and fair
with all your people,
especially the poor.*
³ *Let peace and justice rule
every mountain and hill.*
⁴ *Let the king defend the poor,
rescue the homeless, and crush
everyone who hurts them. Ps 72:1-4 CEV*

“*The Bible calls for personal charity, not Government charity.*” So goes the refrain in some quarters of our nation. However, for the People of Israel, charity was not something separated into the realms of public and private. The People of Israel was a community governed according to God’s Law. God’s law applied to the King (the Government) as well as to the people as individuals. The government was supposed to be just, righteous and charitable just as individuals were supposed to just, righteous and charitable. How that gets translated into our lives can, and undoubtedly will be, a subject of much debate. But don’t proceed from the erroneous foundation that God’s Laws were not meant to apply to “government.”

¹⁵ *The Pharisees got together and planned how they could trick Jesus into saying something wrong.* ¹⁶ *They sent some of their followers and some of Herod’s followers to say to him, “Teacher, we know that you are honest. You teach the truth about what God wants people to do. And you treat everyone with the same respect, no matter who they are.* ¹⁷ *Tell us what you think! Should we pay taxes to the Emperor or not?”*
¹⁸ *Jesus knew their evil thoughts and said, “Why are you trying to test me? You show-offs!”* ¹⁹ *Let me see one of the coins used for paying taxes.” They brought him a silver coin,* ²⁰ *and he asked, “Whose picture and name are on it?”* ²¹ *“The Emperor’s,” they answered. Then Jesus told them, “Give the Emperor what belongs to him and give God what belongs to God.”* ²² *His answer surprised them so much that they walked away.*
Matt 22:15-22 CEV

Likewise, we don’t get to use the government as an excuse for not obeying God’s laws. Jesus makes this clear in his confrontation with the Pharisees. The government may fail to help the poor and the defenseless. That is not a license to argue that your taxes support the charity of the government and that is all you are called upon to give (much as the character Scrooge did in the Dickens classic “A Christmas Carol.”) Jesus reminds the Pharisees that God is not concerned with the taxes the people paid to Rome, but whether the people “gave to God” what was God’s due. In Matthew 25:31-46 Jesus explains that we give to God by giving to those in need.

Bible Study

For the last two years I have led a bible study on Thursday mornings. We are currently studying the Book of Psalms. There is room for as many as would like to participate. Please call me if you have questions or simply come and be a part of our study. We meet from 10:00 to 11:30 on Thursday mornings.

I believe that the study of scriptures with other Christians is an essential part of our journey as Disciples. If you would like to be a part of a bible study at another time, during the day or evening, please contact me. If we can interest four or five people in gathering at a particular time I would be glad to lead another study.

Disciple Bible Study Opportunity

Disciple Bible Study is a 32 week study of the bible from Genesis to Revelation. It has guided many people to a deeper understanding of scripture and their faith over the years. Many in the Church have completed this study.

I have been approached by two people who would be interested in a Disciple Bible Study that met from 7:00 to 9:00 on Thursday evenings. I would like to get at least five more people to participate in this study. If you have considered undertaking a study of the bible before, this is a wonderful opportunity. If you are interested in being a part of this group, please contact me.

Prayer Ministry

The following persons have agreed to be part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Sarah Jordan	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Mac McAfee	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson
Leslie Eastwood	Rachel Newman	Sam Richardson	

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;
- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;
- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God's Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

Up-Coming Sermons

March 23rd: The Journey to Easter: *God Walks With Us.* There are things we have to do alone. But the Gospel remains. As we remind ourselves each Sunday, God is always present with us. The trick is for us to be present for God. My texts are Exodus 17:1–7 and Romans 5:1–11.

March 30th : The Journey to Easter: *Sometimes It's Hard to See The Road.* Maybe the road we are on isn't well traveled and has become overgrown. Perhaps night has closed in and we need light, or fog is obscuring our view. And, sometimes we just don't want to see the road. My texts are 1 Samuel 16:1–13 and John 9:1–17

Worship Leaders Schedule

March 23

Marty Bauguess, **Liturgist**

Mike & Elaine Rohrig, **Greeters**

Maurice & Joyce Edwards, **Ushers**

March 30

Linda Robinson, **Liturgist**

Betty & Herb Haynes, **Greeters**

Dawn & Richard Stevens, **Ushers**

Announcements

Order forms for **Easter Lillies** will be located on the shelves inside the side door. The lilies are \$8.00 each and can be given in memory of or to honor a loved one, a friend or family member. Brooks is coordinating this process.

The **Program Council** will meet **Wednesday, March 26 at 5:30 PM.** Discussion will include Lenten events including the Easter Egg Hunt. All members are encouraged to attend this meeting.

The dates for serving at **61st United Methodist Church** are **April 19, August 16, November 15.** These occasions are all Saturdays. We are planning one more date but at the time of this writing, the date is uncertain.

Jeanne Rybolt and Julia Moore are planning an **Easter egg hunt** for the church. This event is planned for **Saturday, April 19.** (Easter Sunday is April 20). Further details will be forthcoming.

Our **nursery** will have a paid staff member and will also need a volunteer each week. Please let Judy know if you would be willing to serve in the nursery during church hours on a rotating basis so that a schedule can be drafted.

March Birthdays

Pat Moran, Marty Bauguess, Jeff McKearnan, Tom Moore, Herb Haynes, Mary Ellen Salazar

Happy Birthday to each of you!