



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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

Justifying Grace

²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹ "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he? John 4:28-29

For there is no distinction, ²³ since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴ they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶ it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus. Romans 3:22-26

How often do you hear it? Absolutely free, no charge. Limited time offer. Then you read the fine print. Absolutely free with the purchase of this handy gadget for only \$19.95, free for a limited time when you buy three or more of our main product. We distrust the promise of free things. We live by the saying there is no such thing as a free lunch. We cannot really envision anyone giving us something for nothing. But if that is the way we feel, what do we do with the promise of the saving grace of Jesus Christ? The justifying, pardoning grace of Jesus Christ comes to us as a gift. We haven't earned it, we don't deserve it. But, I think the real question for us today is, do we trust enough to accept this gift, or do we shy away, afraid of anything that is offered as a gift?

I.

We are talking about grace, the unearned, unconditional love of God that can transform existence. Last week I wrote about *Prevenient Grace*, the grace of God that comes before our belief. The prevenient grace of God seeks us out wherever we are, like a parent looking for a child in a dark field. We can try to run and hide from that grace, but we can never escape it. If we lock ourselves away in a dark vault at the bottom of a mine shaft, we discover that God can both dig tunnels and pick locks. The prevenient grace of God seeks us out.

The prevenient grace of God also convinces us that that sin in our lives is real. Prevenient grace is like a floodlight that turns night into day, letting us see ourselves clearly. Letting us see who we are and what we have done, to ourselves and others. Every petty thing we have ever done to others is revealed. Every hateful word spoken in anger is brought to the forefront of our minds. When the prevenient grace of God seeks you out

there are no shadows to stand in. We see ourselves for who we are. When we have truly seen ourselves, we can no longer deny our need for God. We know that we need God's help to live lives free from sin. But, the very existence of our sin freezes us in place. We can't imagine turning to God knowing all that we have done. How in the world could God ever accept us?

It is here, when we are confronted with our sin and our need for God, that we can experience the *Justifying Grace* of God. This is the grace that comes through Christ, pardoning our sins, and assuring us that we can live as children of God.

II.

The story of the Samaritan woman at the well is a story about the justifying grace of God.

Jesus is traveling through Samaria with his disciples. Jesus and his disciples were Jews and Jews and Samaritans didn't get along. The feelings of hatred and distrust ran deep. Luke tells of a Samaritan town that snubbed Jesus; that wouldn't even let him enter. Think of many Palestinians and Israelis today. Think of British Soldiers and Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland. Think of Muslims and Hindus in India. Think of Black and white in this country. These people who have a shared heritage, who share a history also have deep feelings of mistrust, even hate. Such were the feelings generally between Jews and Samaritans in Jesus day.

Yet, to get from one place to another in Palestine of Jesus day, one had to pass through Samaria. Samaritans also traveled and traded in the Roman Empire. So these two peoples who hated and distrusted one another were often thrust together.

And so we approach this meeting at the well. The woman has had five husbands and lives with a man outside of wedlock. While it's possible she has buried five husbands, it seems more likely that she has been divorced by one for more of her former husbands. It's likely that this woman was socially unacceptable to many in her village, causing her to come to the well by herself when others would not be there. The woman is surprised that Jesus even speaks to her. Not only is she a woman unaccompanied by a male relative, but she is a Samaritan. Yet, Jesus not only speaks with her but makes it clear that he accepts her just as she is. The feeling of assurance, of acceptance, that this woman experiences is so profound that she runs to her neighbors with this startling testimony:

Come and see this man who knows everything I've ever done. Come and see this man who accepts me even when he truly sees me as I am.

That acceptance, that assurance of acceptance, is at the heart of what we call Justifying Grace. This is the grace that comes from God through Jesus Christ, the pardoning grace of God that allows us to be reconciled with God.

III.

That grace is not free. That grace was purchased with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

We stumble over that idea of Christ dying for us, suffering for us on the cross. How, we ask, could a God of Love have allowed that to happen? The answer to that question starts with an understanding that, woven into God's perfect love is God's perfect justice. Love and Justice are like two strands of thread woven into the tapestry that is creation. Without both strands, the tapestry unravels; it's incomplete. What good is love that doesn't care about justice? Do we go to the battered wife, the abused child, smile at them and say, "God loves

you,” without also saying to the abuser, and to society, “How could you do this?” God’s justice demands restitution; demands to be satisfied. Love, without justice is empty.

By the same token, justice without love fails to acknowledge that life is precious and is a thing to be loved and preserved. Justice without love is cruel. It is justice with no concept of mercy; of compassion. Justice without love never looks at the causes of sin.

We have offended the justice of God. We have sinned against God. God cannot ignore our sin; cannot simply say it no longer matters. God can no more ignore justice than God can ignore love. But, nothing we can do, nothing we can offer can satisfy the demands of God’s justice. So God, in an act of perfect love, in an act of perfect justice, sacrificed Godself in Jesus Christ. In the sacrifice of Godself in Christ, God satisfied God’s Justice; in the act of sacrificing Godself in Christ, God showed God’s perfect love. Jesus Christ died for your sins while you were still a sinner. That sacrifice is the source of justifying grace.

Garrison Keillor tells a story of a thanksgiving meal. The family, aunts, uncles and cousins, gathered around a table almost breaking under the weight of the food placed there. Garrison’s father asked Uncle John to give the blessing. And everyone groaned, for you see, when he gave the blessing, Uncle John recalled the suffering of Christ on the cross, his pain, his agony, the blood, the tears. And every time Uncle John gave the blessing, he was brought to tears over the sacrifice of Christ. Keillor says, “We all knew that Christ died for us, but somehow, Uncle John never quite got over it.”

IV.

The sense of assurance that Christ died for our sins, that our sins are forgiven, can be fleeting at times. We have a hard time accepting that gift of grace. One way to recapture that sense of assurance, to reaffirm your acceptance of that grace, is in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. When we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we go to God in prayer and acknowledge before our neighbors, and silently in our hearts, that we have sinned and that we need Christ in our lives. And as a family we gather around the table understanding that Christ himself is the host of the meal we share. We share the bread, we share the cup. And we offer a prayer for the work of God’s justifying grace in our lives; the grace that we receive in this sacrament, the grace that makes us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to the world. This is the grace that makes us the Body of Christ.

Through Christ we have been reconciled to God. This is God’s Gift, offered without price. But, while this is a gift offered without price, it is a gift that must be accepted through faith.

Think about it in this way. Have you ever known someone who was estranged from a member of their family? Some old dispute had torn the two apart and one of the parties refuses to reconcile. No matter how many overtures are made, the one family member refuses to forgive, refuses to accept the love offered. That is the way some people relate to God. God’s love is always there, always available, but some people will refuse to accept the love of God. The Justifying Grace of God is a gift that must be accepted. Paul speaks of this as the ultimate reconciliation. God, knowing all there is to know about us, through our faith in Jesus Christ has forgiven our sins and accepted us as we are. We need only acknowledge our need for the Love, the Grace, of God to receive the Justifying Grace of God.

A Tale of Two Boats

[In 2011, during my first year as pastor at Trinity, I prepared a sermon on the story of Noah at the request of Jessica Moore. Since the movie "Noah" is opening this week, I thought it might be worthwhile to reprint that sermon.]

Throughout the time I've been a pastor, I've always offered to preach on subjects or scriptures selected by the congregation. I believe that scripture does speak to us today and if there is something that is bothering you in scripture, or some topic that you think deserves to be addressed, and it can be dealt with in a sermon on Sunday morning, then I'll try to do that. By far the hardest sermon topics I've been presented with over the years have come from children and Youth. Today's sermon is in response to a special request by Jessica Moore to preach about the story of Noah.

Let's begin with the most difficult part of this story. How many people here are bothered by the story of Noah? God destroys virtually every living thing on earth except for Noah, his family and the creatures on the Ark. This is pretty grim stuff. This God doesn't much sound like the God Jesus spoke about, does it? But actually, properly understood in context, the story of Noah is a story about God being fair and good.

Most of the bible is made up of narratives; stories. Stories intended to help us better understand the nature of God and better understand ourselves in relation to God. When you read the story of Noah it's helpful to understand that the people who wrote the bible were trying to set the record straight. You see, at one time the people who wrote the bible lived in the land of Babylon. Everyone in Babylon knew a story about how the world was created and how the world was destroyed by a flood. But, the stories of creation and the flood told in Babylon were very different than the stories told in the bible. What I want to do this morning is tell those two stories side by side so you can see what the Babylonians believed about the nature of the gods, and what the People of Israel believed about the nature of God.

I.

The Babylonians believed in many gods, not just one God. In their beliefs, heaven was the home of all sorts of gods who would fight with one another individually or split up into groups for or against other groups of gods.

The Babylonians believed that the world was created when two god's were fighting. The god Marduk fought with the goddess of chaos Timat. Marduk won and killed Timat. The world was then created by Marduk. Marduk cut Timat in half. Marduk shaped one half of Timat into the sky and the other half into the earth. Sort as a way of commemorating the battle I guess. Kind of grizzly, but that's what they believed happened. The gods then set to work caring for the world that Marduk created.

The problem was, the gods were pretty lazy. They didn't want to work and taking care of the earth was **a lot** of work. So, in order to get out of working hard taking care of the earth, the gods created people to be their slaves and live on the earth and grow the food and look after the earth. That way the gods could spend all their time either partying with one another or fighting with one another and not have to do any work. And that worked out for them for a long time.

But, what the god's didn't count on was people having babies. Before they knew it, everywhere they looked there were people. And all those people made a lot of noise. Just when the god's were trying to get a

good night's sleep, the people of earth would make a whole lot of noise and wake everyone up. This made the gods very grumpy.

Finally, one particularly grumpy god had had enough. I'm going to call him Snidely. That isn't what the Babylonians called him, but it's easier to remember and pronounce. Snidely one day says, "Enough is enough. These people are just too noisy. They are driving me crazy. If I don't get a good night's sleep soon, I'll go mad." So he calls a secret meeting in one of the cities on Earth and invites all the other gods. All the other gods were grumpy too because they were so sleepy. At that meeting, Snidely gets the other gods to agree to cause a great flood and to kill all the people. And, just to make sure that they get everyone and the people don't build boats to save themselves, Snidely swears all the god's to secrecy.

But one of the god's, I'll call him Dudley, thinks that Snidely is over-reacting. So he tells the secret to a man named Utnapishtim. Really. That was his name. But for purposes of this story, I'll call him Sailor Bob. Dudley warns Sailor Bob about the flood and tells him to build a boat to save as many people and animals as he can. So that's what Sailor Bob does. And, when the flood comes, Sailor Bob, and everyone on his boat and all the animals on the boat ride out the flood.

After the flood, Sailor Bob throws a big barbeque. And the all the gods except Snidely, who love to party, all came and wanted to be a part of the celebration. So Sailor Bob let the gods stay and eat. When Snidely does show up, the other gods all yell at him for planning the flood, even though it was just as much their fault as Snidely's. Sailor Bob and the other gods send Snidely off by himself for being such a bad god. And, in order to sort of show Sailor Bob that they were sorry about what happened, the rest of the gods made Sailor Bob immortal.

The lessons of the story of the Babylonians:

1. There are a lot of gods.
2. The Earth was created as an after-thought by one of the gods to commemorate a fight.
3. People were created to be slaves to the gods.
4. The gods can be ill-tempered and irrational and just generally not very nice to be around. They would just as soon kill you as look at you.
5. The gods like a good barbeque.

II.

That is the story the people of Israel heard when they went to Babylon. Now the people of Israel knew about the flood, but they told the Babylonians that the Babylonians had it all wrong. The people of Israel said that creation and the flood happened this way.

Before there was anything else, there was God surrounded by chaos. And God loved to create things. So God looked at the chaos and said, "I'm going to make something good out of all of this." And that's what God did. God took the chaos and made the whole universe: the sun, the moon and stars the earth and everything that lives on the earth. And, because God wanted some company, God created people too. God made them in God's image so that people too would like to create things. And God looked at everything that he had created and said that it was good.

And, God watched the people every day to see what they would do. You see, God had given the people free will so they could decide for themselves how they would live. And, over time, God became very sad about

the people. Everywhere he looked, people were using their free will to do bad things. As the years went by, things just got worse and worse. All the people were doing all the time was causing trouble; cheating one another, hurting one another, killing one another, or staying up at night to figure out new ways to cheat, hurt and kill one another. Finally, it got so bad that there was only one man and his family who didn't spend all their time doing evil. That man's name was Noah.

So, God decided that he would have to wipe out all the life on the earth, except Noah and his family, and start over. He told Noah to build a big boat and even told Noah how to make it. And when it came time to bring the flood, God saw to it that the boat contained Noah and his family, as well as two of every creature on earth so that life could start over. And the rains came, and the flood came, and it took forty days for the flood to be over.

And, when the flood was over, Noah opened the Boat and let all the animals out. Then God spoke to Noah and all the animals. And God promised that He would never again destroy the world in a flood. And, so that God and the people and the animals would remember that promise, God said that He would put a rainbow in the sky whenever it rained.

Lessons from the story of Noah:

1. There is only one God.
2. God intentionally created the universe out of chaos, bringing order. God created people to take care of the earth and live good lives on the earth.
3. God is a God of justice. God didn't want to destroy the world, but did so only when it seemed that there was no other choice because the world had become such an evil place. But God spared Noah and his family because they were not evil.
4. God has promised that God will never again destroy the world in a great flood.
5. We don't know that God likes barbeques, but the bible tells us that Jesus spent a lot of time at parties so God probably does like barbeques.

Conclusion

Still a troublesome story? Absolutely. But I think that you'd agree that the story of Noah expresses beliefs about God very different from those of the Babylonians. Whenever you read a bible story, don't ask yourself questions like where and when it happened. Don't spend your time looking for the remains of Noah's Ark. Ask yourself what the story tells you about God and what the story tells you about yourself. You see, that is the purpose of the Bible. As we read these stories, we open our hearts and minds to God and one another. As we read these stories, we come to know God and one another. Thanks be to God.

[Side note: Based upon trailers for the movie, there is a rather complicated villain played by Anthony Hopkins and named "Tubal-Cain." He's allegedly a descendent of the Cain who slew his brother. For the record, the bible does mention Tubal-Cain. Here is what it says and all it says about Tubal-Cain: ²² Zillah bore Tubal-cain, who made all kinds of bronze and iron tools. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah. Genesis 4:22 NRSV.]

No Administrative Council Meeting On March 29th

The previously scheduled Administrative Council meeting for March 29th has been postponed. A new date will be announced soon.

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.

⁸ From heaven you announced
your decisions as judge!
And all who live on this earth
were terrified and silent
⁹ when you took over as judge,
ready to rescue
everyone in need. Ps 76:8-9 CEV

Whenever you read scripture, be sensitive to the unexpected joining of ideas. Be conscious of those passages that seem to bring together ideas that aren't usually set side by side. Consider this passage from Psalm 76 for instance. God is portrayed as Judge and the people are terrified and silenced by what is to come in those judgments. But, verse 9 proclaims that God became Judge to rescue everyone in need. Our society is very judgmental, especially with regard to those who, for whatever reason, seem to have a difficult time caring for themselves. The Psalm reminds us that the judgments of God are intended to rescue those in need, not to condemn.

¹⁶ God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die. ¹⁷ God did not send his Son into the world to condemn its people. He sent him to save them! John 3:16-17

Likewise, the Gospel of John reaffirms the purpose of God in acting through Jesus Christ. God sent his son not to condemn the world, but to save it. To reach out to all of us for we are all in need of the grace of God. Rather than rushing to judgment regarding the worth of those around us, we should take to heart that, before God, we all stand in need of God's grace.

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 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

April 6th: The Journey to Easter: *God Opens New Roads.* Our Discipleship Journey can take us to new places, on roads we never thought we would walk. God is a God of New Beginnings. My texts are Ezekiel 37:1-14 and John 11:1-45.

Worship Leaders Schedule

March 30

Linda Robinson, **Liturgist**

Betty & Herb Haynes, **Greeters**

Dawn & Richard Stevens, **Ushers**

April 6

Rachel Newman, **Liturgist**

Tommy & Jo Cotton, **Greeters**

Mike & Elaine Rohrig, **Ushers**

Announcements

Order forms for **Easter Lilies** 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.

On April 22nd at 6:00 p.m., the ladies of our church will be hosting the annual **Columbia District United Methodist Women's Partners in Mission Dinner/Event at our church.**

This year the focus mission is **BRIDGES of Williamson County, a local Shelter and Domestic Violence Program.** Our guest speaker is **Linda Crockett Jackson, the founder of BRIDGES.** BRIDGES offers the standard core components of shelter, court advocacy, child advocacy, support groups, clinic services and outreach. We look forward to learning more about this mission and Ms. Jackson's work.

If you would like to help BRIDGES, there will be boxes placed around the church marked BRIDGES for donations that we want to begin collecting from now until April 22nd. Please see the list below.

Kroger gift cards in SMALL denominations, given to clients to purchase gas, prescriptions and food. Please give these to our Treasurer, Nanette.

Additional items needed by the clients of BRIDGES:

kitchen and lawn size garbage bags
laundry detergent

60W light bulbs
copy paper
cleaning products - no Lysol or bleach products please
body wash
shampoo/creme rinse

Please see Dana for more information.

The **Program Council** will meet **tonight 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, May 24, August 16, November 15**. These occasions are all Saturdays. Be aware that April 19 is the Saturday before Easter. Food will be purchased and taken to the 61st Street church that day but we will not be serving the food.

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.

There are sign-up lists on the Bulletin Board for volunteers who will prepare communion as well as hosting the First Sunday meal. Please sign up!

March Birthdays

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

Happy Birthday to each of you!