



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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Wesley's Theology of Grace Prevenient Grace: The Grace That Seeks Us Out

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. Genesis 12:1 NRSV

I've been reviewing the core Methodist beliefs. I've done this from the pulpit over the years, and in the newsletter. Still, there is a benefit in reminding ourselves that, despite similarities in theology we share with all Christian traditions, there really are differences in theology among the Southern Baptists, Church of Christ, the Presbyterians, Lutherans, Roman Catholics and United Methodists as well as the other protestant and Catholic traditions. Central to an understanding of Wesleyan theology is an understanding of God's Grace.

Let's begin by defining what we mean by God's Grace. After tragedies like mass shootings, it is common for the press to ask families of the accused for a "response." "How does the family feel about the harm caused by their son, daughter, father or other family member?" Asked if the family stands by the suspect the response is often that they do. They hate the harm and grief caused by their family member but they still love their family member.

Unearned, undeserved, unconditional love. A type of love that can push its way into a sick and troubled mind. The love of the family for their member who has caused great suffering is a shadow of what we describe as God's love for the world and its people. 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. The problem with that vision is that it's 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.”

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. God makes 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.

The Prevenient grace of God also makes us aware of the ways we have sinned against God. The ways we have failed to love God and one another. Like that alleged shooter in Colorado listening to his family, 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. It is the Justifying Grace of God that makes us part of the Body of Christ.

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. Helping us to recapture the image of God that scripture says is part of our make-up. *Gen 1:27*. That is the Sanctifying Grace or Perfecting 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 and the world.

Over the next few weeks, we will consider the nature of the Grace of God that surrounds us always the grace working in our lives. This article will examine the Prevenient Grace of God. This is the grace that seeks us out.

God is always with us, every moment of every day. Like the families of the mass shooters, 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. That is Prevenient Grace.

That is a faith claim central to all we believe. God wants us to follow. The God that created the universe, that created all there is to see and experience, and 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. God is seeking you! Sometimes all you need to 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. Or, unnoticed by you, you locked God in with you. 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?" 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 hymns but they talk about our need for Christ as a friend. Everybody needs friends, after all.

The Preventive Grace of God convinces us of **the necessity** of having Christ in our lives. 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 Preventive Grace of God convinces us of our need for Christ. Consider the story of Nicodemus. *John 3:1-21*. 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, 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 and we find ourselves in the dark. It is then that the Preventive Grace of God can work in our lives, convincing us that we really do have a problem with sin, convincing us that we really do need Christ in our lives.

Wesleyan Theology, United Methodist Theology, focuses on understanding the Grace of God. The Grace of God is a power for transformation in our lives and in the world. God's Preventive 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 Preventive Grace that convinces us, that convicts us, of the sin in our lives. It is God's Preventive Grace that convinces us that we need Christ.

January 24th Ebenezer Dinner

In the Old Testament an Ebenezer is a monument to the work of God in our lives. Everyone is cordially invited to attend an Ebenezer Dinner on January 24th, at 5:00 PM to celebrate all that God has done, and is doing, at Trinity UMC. We will look in detail at our financial results for 2015 and will also look ahead to 2016 and beyond. The meal will be catered. There is no charge for the meal but it would be helpful to know how many of you will be able to come. Please let Dana Bauguess know if you will be able to attend. Dana needs this information by January 19. Please let her know as soon as possible.

Thursday Morning Bible Study

Our Thursday morning Bible Study meets on Thursday mornings between 10:00 and 11:30. Everyone is welcome to attend. It has been my practice to allow the group to decide what parts of the bible they wish to study. We have concluded our study of Mark and Matthew and have begun a study of Luke.

The Poverty and Justice Bible

I'm now on my way to judge you. And I will quickly condemn all who practice witchcraft or cheat in marriage or tell lies in court or rob workers of their pay or mistreat widows and orphans or steal the property of foreigners or refuse to respect me. Malachi 3:5 CEV

A biblical theme from beginning to end is the concept of Judgment. Everyone faces judgment. A Christian does not get a free pass from judgment. Although assured of salvation, we will still stand before God at the end of our lives and give an account. I tend to think that the experience of that Judgment will be as painful as all the hells imaginative writers have described. To know how short we have fallen in our attempt to follow God will be a devastating experience. Malachi once again brings us back to the concept that the evil we do to one another, especially victimizing the poor and defenseless, will be central to God's judgment.

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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.

Prayer Ministry

The following persons are part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

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

January 24th: Sermon: As Unlikely as it Seems, We Are the Body of Christ. Enough said. My Texts are Luke 4:14–21 and 1 Corinthians 12:12–31a.

January 31st: God, the Clueless Personnel Manager. Have you ever looked at a co-worker or worse, a boss, and wondered how they managed to get and keep their jobs? Asked yourself who it was that selected that person for that job when they seem so unsuited for the work? Yet God is always selecting unlikely people for the most difficult tasks. My texts are Jeremiah 1:4-10 and Luke 4:21-30.

Worship Leader's Schedule

January 24

Elaine Rohrig, **Liturgist**

Pat Moran & Linda Robinson, **Greeters**

Dawn & Richard Stevens, **Ushers**

January 31

Ken Strait, **Liturgist**

Dorise & Bill LeCates, **Greeters**

Hal & Rachel Newman, **Ushers**

Announcements

Give the gift of music and give to Trinity! Mystisa Records has just announced the re-release of two of Brooks Crowell's previous albums, "**Christmas at Burke Hollow**" originally released in 2009 and "**Love Ye The Lord**" released in 2011. Digitally re-mastered to enhance the quality of the recordings, these CD's make a great inspirational gift. The CD's are available in Fellowship Hall for \$12 each and the proceeds for this re-release go to Trinity UMC general fund.

The **Nanette Crowell Companions in Christ Sunday School class** has begun a new study. We are studying, "**Jesus: Understanding His Death and Resurrection.**" This is a study of Mark 14-16 which we will continue for six weeks. This study was created by Kay and David Arthur who are well known for founding "Precept Ministries." Please consider being a part of this inspiring and interesting study. We enjoy fellowship as well as our Study. All are welcome to join us in Sunday School. Our fellowship begins at 9:45. The study begins at 10:00 AM.

Birthdays in January

Cherry Klein, Dawn Stevens, Dennis Meaker, Ensley Mason, Renee Fetting, Judy Richardson, Linda McGill, Jessica Moore, Laura Otto

Happy Birthday of each of you!