



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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Wesley's Theology of Grace Justifying Grace: The Grace That Reconciles

*Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."
Luke 23:34a NRSV*

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. Do we trust enough to accept this gift or do we shy away, afraid of anything that is offered as a gift?

We are talking about John Wesley's theology of God's grace. Grace is 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 tunnel 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. Prevenient grace allows us to see who we are and what we have done to others and ourselves. Every petty thing we have ever done to others is revealed, every hateful word spoken in anger. 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.

The story of the Samaritan woman at the well is a story about the justifying grace of God. (John 4:1-26). 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; wouldn't even let him enter. Think of many Palestinians and Israelis today, British Soldiers and Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland, Muslims and Hindus in India, black and white in this country. These are all people who have a shared heritage, a shared history, but also have deep feelings of mistrust or even hate. Those were the feelings generally between Jews and Samaritans in Jesus' day. Yet, to get from one place to another in first century Palestine one had to pass through Samaria and 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, the grace that comes from God through Jesus Christ, the pardoning grace of God that allows us to be reconciled with God.

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?

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, "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, to be preserved. Justice without love is cruel. It is justice with no concept of mercy or compassion, justice that 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 God's self in Jesus Christ. In the sacrifice of God's self in Christ, God satisfied God's Justice; in the act of sacrificing God's self in Christ, God showed God's perfect love. Jesus Christ died for your sins. 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."

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 out loud 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 this meal. We share the bread, share the cup and offer a prayer for the work of God's justifying grace in our lives. We ask 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.

The next time you come to the Table, come with an openness to receive the forgiveness of God for all your sins and come with an openness to accept Christ as the Lord of your life. The Grace of God is offered to all, but it is not forced on anyone. You must respond to that gift, and accept it for your life.

Thursday Morning Bible Study

Our Thursday morning Bible Study meets 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

⁴ Don't ever forget the laws and teachings I gave my servant Moses on Mount Sinai.

⁵ I, the LORD, promise to send the prophet Elijah before that great and terrible day comes. ⁶ He will lead children and parents to love each other more, so that when I come, I won't bring doom to the land.

Malachi 4:4-6 CEV

The Christian Canon for the Old Testament ends with these words from Malachi. Remember the laws of Moses. Love each other.

This series of articles on Poverty and Justice began the first week of June, 2013. Each week I have provided passages from the Old Testament, and often complimentary passages from the New Testament, that emphasize that Christians are to focus on insuring justice for, and the welfare of, their neighbors. Two and a half years later we have covered most of scripture from Genesis to Revelation. Throughout scripture the consistent message is that we are to care about what happens to one another; about the welfare of one another. Even the welfare of those we call enemy. That is what Christian Love is all about. If you would claim a personal relationship to Jesus Christ then you must also claim a personal relationship with the rest of the people in the world.

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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:

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 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.

February 7th: The Mountain: Sometimes you must see things from a different perspective to understand. My texts are Exodus 34:29-35 and Luke 9:28-36.

Worship Leader's Schedule

January 31

Ken Strait, **Liturgist**

Dorise & Bill LeCates, **Greeters**

Hal & Rachel Newman, **Ushers**

February 7

Linda Robinson, **Liturgist**

Mike & Renee Fetting, **Greeters**

Stacy & Jan Bell, **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** is 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!