The Grit(s) of Grace
Pentecost Sunday | Deuteronomy 7:6-9; 2 Corinthians 12:1-10; John 1:14-17

Inspiration from: Free of Charge – Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace by Miroslav Volf

Little in life is free - but gifts are supposed to be free. But what in life really is?

4 images of God (that are fabrications and not reality of God):

A. God the Negotiator
   We want to deal – if you make me: healthy, wealthy, beautiful, rich – I’ll always be good, tithe every week, say my prayers, be nice to people – come to church
   1) God doesn’t need anything we have
   2) We can’t make God comply with the terms of our deal
   If we see God as the negotiator – the law will be our burden. It may seem like the OT is like that: Deut 31:28: If you will obey the Lord your God …all these blessings will come on you. But the Israelites were delivered from the slavery in Egypt – before the law was given

Deut 7:8: But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

“God’s goods aren’t for sale – you can’t buy them with money or good deeds. God doesn’t make deals – God gives.” Miroslav Volf

B. God the Santa Claus
   Since we can’t make deals with God – we then run to God as a Santa Claus – someone who showers us with gifts. Santa gives – without conditions.

Yes – God is a source of every good gift – but is it true that God demands nothing from us? “Unlike Santa – God just doesn’t scatter gifts – God also urges us to do this or not do that. A Santa God gives simply so we can have and enjoy things: the true God gives so we can become joyful givers and not just self-absorbed receivers.” Volf

C. God the Creator
   Like the demanding toddler child – who wants everything immediately from his parents – we also forget that everything along with our food and our shelter and everything else we have – is not owed to us. It’s God’s creation. It’s God’s gift. It’s created by and given by God. As Paul writes: Romans 11:36 - For from him and through him and to him are all things

So as creator – God is a giver.

D. God the Redeemer
   We try hard to make ourselves independent of God – we try to have it both ways - standing on our own two feet – yet affirming that God is the creator of everything. So why doesn’t God deprive us of God’s gifts since we don’t receive them rightly? There’s really no way for us on our own to “crawl out of sin’s hole” – in fact our attempts only serve to sink us deeper.

Gal 2:21: “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”
Martin Luther says that “the love of God flows forth and bestows good.”

Our obligations: (not benefits from the gift – but our response to receiving the gift)

A. Faith
   an expression of the fact that we exist so that God can dwell in us and work in us. “Faith denies that we are the tiny, self-obsessed specks of matter who are reaching for the star, but remain stuck to the earth in our own self-absorption. Faith is the first part of the bridge from self-centeredness to generosity” Volf

B. Gratitude
   not a return gift, but when I am grateful – I honor God as the giver

C. Availability
   God’s gifts call on us to make ourselves available to the giver. We give ourselves for God to use us to benefit creation

D. Participation
   the flow of giving shouldn’t stop when it reaches us – to pass the gifts on – we participate in God’s gift giving.

The paradox of true love is the opposite of self-love.

Need-love versus Gift-love

A. Need-love: we are born helpless – we immediately need others physically, emotionally, intellectually

B. Gift-love: sacrificial love based not on one’s own desires or likes, but solely for the benefit of another

Divine love is gift love – God’s love for us and for the Son

4 degrees of love (St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1155))

1) I love me for my benefit – all about me because there is no you

2) I love you for my benefit – one step up from complete egomaniac, allows for the existence of the other but only for their personal advancement and satisfaction

3) I love you for your benefit – complete self-deprivation, appears good on surface, but not sustainable

4) I love me for your benefit – reciprocity and mutuality, self-love but not selfish love

Which one best describes God’s love?
Based on our model of love and the need to be givers – let’s look at how we relate to one another:

3 modes in which we relate to one another

1) Coercive mode – insider information – sell stocks, steal what doesn’t belong to us
2) Sales mode – we give something in order to get something, consumerism, working for a wage
3) Gift mode – give favors we don’t owe and the recipients don’t deserve.

Ephesians 4:28 - He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

So why give?
Because God gives. Because it was God's intention for us. It’s what happens when our old self is stripped away and the new self is indwelled by Christ.

Grace

The one really big thing we have been neglecting here is that: what we receive from God is not owed to us and WE DON’T DESERVE it. – this is the meaning of Grace

Grace is getting what you don’t deserve and the companion of that is mercy: NOT getting what you do deserve.

Grace is available to those humble enough to seek it.

2 Corinthians 12: 19 ‘My grace is enough for you, for my power is perfected in your weakness.’

Forgiveness

Now – take the gift of grace one step further – to forgiveness

3 modes of our relating

A. Coercive mode – Revenge – requires something in return equal to the assault against us
B. Sales mode – Justice – still requires blame and punishment, no longer an eye for an eye equivalent
C. Gift Mode – Forgiveness – forgo the demand for retribution, to forgive is to blame, not to punish

Forgiveness is the ultimate in Gift-giving; and in Grace.
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1) What appears to be free in life – but really isn’t? How are we trapped or mislead by things that appear to be free but aren’t?

2) Which God attribute (Negotiator, Santa Claus, Creator, Redeemer) resonates initially with you? Why? How has looking at these four categories changed your thinking?

3) Reflect more on God the Redeemer. How does our own attempt to “crawl out of sin’s hole” sink us further into sin and away from God?

4) Which obligation: faith, gratitude, availability, participation – is your first response to God’s gifts? Why is this your first response? Which obligation is your last response? Why? What can you do this week to respond in each of the four obligations?

5) Discuss the four degrees of love. Which one do YOU think best describes God’s love for us? Why?

6) What does it mean to you that we don’t deserve God’s grace? Where specifically in your life has God given you grace? Who in your life has given you grace? What was your response?

7) Pray about forgiveness. Ask God to show you someone that you have been withholding forgiveness from. It may be someone in your family today or it may be from a long time ago. Reflect on Paul’s statement from 2 Corinthians 12:10: That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. What does this mean in light of what God has revealed to you about forgiveness?