

“We Live By Grace”

Psalm 139:1-12, John 8:1-20

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A Christian magazine, *The Christian Century* (Jan, 2012), asked theologians, pastors and others to answer and respond to a question. The question was this, “What’s the gospel in seven words?” There were quite a number of responses and answers. Some expanded in a few sentences. The editor summarized all answers into a simple sentence: **We Live By Grace**. The magazine editor made comments, and he says, “By grace we’re created in the image of God. When we corrupt our lives with sin, the grace of God in Jesus Christ forgives us and makes us fully alive again. By grace the Holy Spirit binds us to this savior, includes us in the church, moves our chaos over to create beauty, and interrupts our plans with God’s dream that we too become gracious. Along the way the holy image re-emerges in our lives.”

What is Grace? Let’s make sure what this means. The most unique contribution that Christianity makes to the world among other religions is **Grace**. There are many different Christian denominations in the world and each denomination has its own theological perspectives but Grace is the one that all Christian churches have no question and unanimously agree as the core and essence of Christianity. Why is grace so important?

Even though we Christians often use the term, *Grace*, it is surprising that Jesus never explicitly taught “Grace” to his disciples. I don’t mean that Jesus didn’t want to talk about Grace. What Jesus showed and shared through his life and death was a revelation of God’s grace. Grace is God’s mercy and love for us and it helps us understand how God’s love works in our life. First of all, I want to clarify two words: Faith and Grace. Without acknowledgement of God’s presence in our life, if you think that God is not real, to you, faith is useless and Grace is meaningless. In Christian faith, faith means your choice whether to accept God as your ultimate source of relationship, trust, strength and love. The surprise is that Grace is a totally free gift by God’s special favor. This gift has been given away and available to us by Jesus Christ. Grace always awaits us to be taken, but if we do not open the door, it is still not yet ours. I am reminded by John Wesley’s approach to faith. As a preacher, I will preach faith until you have it.

I want to share John Wesley’s personal experience of Grace with you. In 1736, John Wesley arrived in Georgia for his missionary work but it wasn’t very successful. When he returned to England, he was spiritually down and questioned his faith. He struggled with his personal feelings of inadequacy as a

preacher. He knew that he believed in God and the power of God, so he believed that he had faith, but he had not yet come to understand the experience of grace in his own work. He had not yet felt the power and inner peace of Grace in him. Wesley's spiritual coach, the Moravian Peter Bohler encouraged Wesley to preach faith till you have it, and then, because you have it you will preach faith. To better understand the concept of Grace, John Wesley described his own grace experience in his journal. In his words, "In the evening, I went unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. John Wesley received the grace he needed to experience both the power and peace that were missing from his faith. Later, John Wesley defined Grace as "Outward signs, words, or actions of his own inner peace."

How did Jesus teach and share God's grace to people? Let's revisit Jesus' story in the Scripture reading. In verse 2-3, early in the morning, scribes and Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery. Their purpose was to put Jesus in trouble using Moses' law which required adulterous women should be stoned to death. In their eyes, Jesus didn't follow God's commandment revealed in Moses' law. This is a hard and puzzling situation. What was Jesus' response? Jesus answered "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." What on earth does his answer mean to the religious leaders and to us?

In the Scripture reading, actually there are more clues to understand what exactly Jesus wanted to share with us. In verse 9, the Bible says, "When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders." Probably, we can imagine that they all had grabbed stones and were ready to throw them at her, but all of a sudden they laid down their stones and went away. What would trigger them to change their hearts and attitude? The stones are a metaphor of God's righteousness and truth so it was their duty to keep it right by executing justice. But they didn't throw the stones at the sinner in the name of righteous God. What really happened to their hearts? We can just imagine that they were challenged by Jesus. Jesus urged them to think about themselves how they were still safe under God even as they were sinners. They were relating to the woman. How could they survive not being stoned to death as this adulterous woman? Right after they heard Jesus' words, they realized that the reason they survived was only God's Grace. I imagine God's grace touched their hearts and became gracious to the woman. In addition, what the woman received from Jesus was

peace and advocacy in the act of love. It was Grace to her.

We are also eager to receive this saving grace and mercy from Jesus. We may not be like this adulterous woman, but in some ways, we are facing difficulties and challenges. Life is not easy. In life, there are many unexpected obstacles and barriers: like a huge wall in front of us we might feel frustrated and find disappointment in ourselves. We try to be perfect to control our lives, but what we experience is an overwhelming wave of storms. Many times, we feel inadequate. We need power and peace, but it is hard to find them in us. When we are in trouble, God brings us grace that has power and peace to strengthen us. This is Grace! How is your life going? Are you shaken by the storms in life? When you pray to God, ask God to give you faith to receive a gift of grace for power and inner peace to overcome your life challenges, so that you will never be shaken by any troubles in this world. This is what God promises to all people of faith. Receive the Grace of God and live by it! Amen.