

Sermon 3-18

“The breadth of Grace and our choices”

John 3:14-21

The sermon this morning considers such a beloved verse John 3:21

No, surely you mean John 3:16. “For God so loved the world”

No, I was thinking of John 3:21 “**21** But the one who practices the truth comes to the light, so that it may be plainly evident that their deeds have been done in God.”

(This is a scriptural joke, poking fun at the way we see what we expect to in scripture. But scripture is broader and deeper than the way we read it. Even John’s classic statement of God’s love does not end with what we receive – but continues on – to what the consequences of God’s love will be- the way we will be changed)

As I drew nearer to this week, a number of different elements called for my attention. We have the opening hymn, listing the different ways we may experience God’s saving power. And last week, Bill asked me “what is grace?”, a profound question, of depth and breadth. I resolved to preach on it , at some future date. Then, I awoke to the fact, It fits: now!

And so I arrived at this week “the breadth of Grace and our choices”. For we are talking about God’s grace. God’s grace has been a part of our sermon for three weeks now in - 3 things we have to share as we build Christ’s next church: 1. God’s purpose, 2. the discipleship of hope, and 3. God’s grace, given to us that we may share!

But what is grace?

The Greek word for grace is “charis” (χαρις) and it means divine favor, a blessing. We know it in words like charisma, bearing a personal gift, and Eucharist (communion) which is literally God’s good gift to us. Yet, like our opening hymn,

God's favor to us can take many "saving" shapes: deliverance in illness, in the face of a storm, in the face of fear.

But our understanding of grace begins with Christ. Even Wikipedia will give you a definition directly related to John 3:16. (Paraphrased) Grace is God's gift in Jesus Christ, freely given, which bears us into eternal life and new life. Yet our personal experience extends the bounds of this simple (if profound) statement of God's love in Christ.

The breadth of Grace - choral reading

1 For me the gift of grace is not just Christ bringing me into eternal life BUT that God would take human form **at all**, grace is God's gift of incarnation.

2 I find constant amazement in the grace of God in the whole of creation and all its natural wonders.

3 For me , I find grace in the story of the man lowered through the roof by his friends, where in one moment he is not only healed but forgiven

4 For me the grace of God **IS** the **New life** which is ours in Christ I see this in the raising of Lazarus

5 I think God's grace is being set free from lifelong problems like the healing of the man born blind

6 Yes, healing of long term afflictions like The healing of the woman –who was ill for 13 years and who merely touched Jesus clothes and was healed

Moment pause --

7 For me, grace is a bit more quiet, I find God's grace in the power of prayer

8 (continuing that thought) in the power of prayer and silent contemplation

9 I find God's grace to be **astonishing**, it is as stunning as Christ holding the leper, kissing the leper clean.

10 For me God's grace is the promise of heaven and life eternal

11 I find God's grace in Christ's acceptance of us **as we are** like rescuing Peter who in his doubts was sinking

12 Acceptance, yes, but the more, it is God's Forgiveness - like Jesus forgiving Peter, even in his betrayal

13 I would have to say that God's grace is God's word. It is the scriptures which bear God's grace to me.

14 For me it is God's call to discipleship. God's call which changes my life.

15 I find God's grace in the joy of praise

16 **As** you might imagine – I find God's grace in music, in the joy of sacred song.

17 I find God's grace, **God present to me** in the fellowship of faith

18 No, It is Communion. The very body and blood of Christ, the bread of heaven, the cup of new life which bear God's grace.

19 God's grace **changes** me, because Christ expects an honest accountability, which sets me free, like the woman at the well.

20 No, I would say grace is that God loves each of us – and loves us as we are – and loves us into the new life

Having considered the different ways we may personally experience grace, at a

foundational level, we have it **in common** in God's love for us in Christ. For God so loved the world... that in Christ.....we may have eternal life.

What we have in grace is both **in common** and yet **personal** (and unique). What is stunning, is that God's love=Divine Favor=grace, which we know together, as the people of Christ, also extends to each of us in personal, particular ways and experiences. Grace is as common to us as Christ, and as varied as our personal journey.

But Grace is also the key to our future as Christ's church because it is that wealth, given to us, that we may share! Amazing Grace! It is a gift, which necessitates our choice and action. It is the gift which becomes the inviting foundation of Christ's church. We have God's gift (in Christ): Grace! To share!