

## 1. Know The Gift of Grace – Ephesians 2:1-9

In the Lutheran church, we talk a lot about grace. We emphasize God's all-sufficient grace in Christ. We talk about how we are saved by grace alone. We often point out how all that we have and all that we are comes from the grace of God. We talk a lot about grace, but do you really know grace? I'm not asking for the Confirmation definition—God's undeserved love for us in Christ. That is certainly what grace is, but do you know grace? Do you know God's gift of grace from experience? How has God's grace made a difference in your life?

Perhaps the best way to know God's gift of grace is to know what you were. God's Word makes it pretty clear what you and I once were and what we are all by nature. It's an ugly picture. It's a horrifying look in the mirror. It's disgusting and heartbreaking. **"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins..."** You were dead—not sort-of alive, not half-dead or kinda dead, but completely and totally consumed by death.

You see, over the years all those times when you've crossed God's "No Trespassing" line, you have put yourself in danger. You have put yourself within range of sin and death. Before you knew it, sin and death attacked you. It gets worse. We weren't just dead like stones. No, we were active in that death. Our walk through this life was not devoted to Christ, but to the impulses of this world, to the power of Satan, to the unclean spirit at work in the hearts of the disobedient, including you and me. We devoted our lives to the cravings and lusts of the flesh being pulled around by whatever impulse seduced us. By nature, we were children of wrath, in many ways, mind and heart-controlled zombies **"just like all the rest."**

**"But..."** On that little word, everything changes. The dawn of God's gift of grace broke into our darkness. God in his grace broke into our dead, craving-fulfilling, zombie lives when he sent Christ into our darkness. The Apostle Paul positively soars when he speaks of that gift of grace. **"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved!"** Our abounding-in-mercy God made us alive when we were dead. Why? Because he is filled to overflowing with undeserved, self-sacrificing, saving love for sinners like us! We were made alive with Christ. We were raised with Christ. We were seated with Christ receiving the eternal inheritance of heaven—a place he prepared for us. We were saved by...grace! We are the proof of God's glorious grace in Christ. How?

Paul answers with some of the most famous words in Scripture. **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."** We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. We didn't make that happen. We didn't make ourselves alive. We couldn't. We didn't raise ourselves. We couldn't. We didn't earn our seats in heaven. We couldn't, but God did it all because of his...grace. That's the gift we know, the gift of God's grace in Christ.

*Hear now a reading from Ephesians 2.*

## 2. Own the Gift of Grace – Ephesians 3:14-19

Knowing and owning are two different things. We can't just know God's gift of grace, but as children of God, we need to own it, to make it our own, to take hold of it with hearts and lives motivated by faith in Christ. When the Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesian Christians, he was in prison. He had been in several different prisons for a couple years making his way to Rome to appeal to the Roman emperor re: some false charges that were leveled against him. So under house arrest, guarded by a Roman soldier, with the verdict of life or death still hanging over his head, Paul penned this beautiful symphony of a letter that we know as Ephesians.

Paul knew that the Ephesian Christians were getting discouraged because of his sufferings and imprisonment. He loved them dearly after having served among them planting a mission in that coastal city. So what does Paul do for these discouraged believers? He encourages them. He points them back to themes that he had highlighted back in Ephesians 2. He encouraged them with God's glorious wealth of grace and how faith is the instrument by which God gives us that glorious wealth. He encouraged his beloved believers to be deeply rooted in God's grace, the undeserved, self-sacrificing love that God had shown them. He wanted them to "own" that gift of grace, to make it their own, and to do that, he prayed for them. He prayed that the Ephesian Christians would grasp the full, jaw-dropping extent of Christ's love for us. He prayed that they would grasp **"how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge..."** Why? He prayed that God would fill them with his grace **"to the measure of all the fullness of God."**

So do you "own" God's gift of grace? Is God's grace more than knowledge in your life? Is it your own? Do you grasp how broad and long God's grace in Christ is for you? God's love for you in Christ is beyond any human

measure. Like the Psalmist once sang, **“As far as the east is from the west, so far has the Lord removed our transgressions from us.”** (Psalm 103:12) Do you grasp how high and deep God’s grace is in Christ for you? God’s love for you in Christ reaches to the heights of heaven and pulls you up from the deepest depths of sin, guilt, and despair. Through faith in Christ, we grasp the full extent of that gift. That grasping leads to deep rootedness in God’s love. That grasping leads to strengthening as the Holy Spirit conveys those blessings to you and me through Word and water and meal creating and strengthening faith in our hearts.

Owning God’s gift of grace means tapping into God’s vast wealth of compassion and love through faith in your Savior Jesus. Owning God’s gift of grace means being strengthened day after day through the work of the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament. Owning God’s gift of grace means being deeply rooted in Christ’s love so that when trouble or hardship or sorrow comes into your life, you remain firmly established on that love of Christ. That’s how through eyes of faith, you will see how broad and wide and high and deep the love of Christ really, truly is for you. You know God’s gift of grace, and it is your own

*Hear now a reading from Ephesians 3.*

### **3. Make Known the Gift of Grace – 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Ephesians 3:20-21**

Now what? It’s a question that we as children of God need to ask ourselves every time we step foot outside of God’s house. In worship, I have come to know the gift of God’s grace all the more. It has become my own—for me!—through faith in Christ. Yet when I leave this place and step back out into the world, back into my home, my neighborhood, my classroom, my workplace, back into my community, then what? I’ve experienced God’s gift of grace in Christ. I know that it’s my own, but now what? What will I do with it?

Knowing and owning God’s gift of grace impacts who I am out in the world, who I am in every calling the Lord graciously gives to me, especially the calling of ambassador. Now I don’t represent a nation or this nation to any earthly ruler, but as soon as I leave this place, I represent Christ to the world. What does that mean?

It means living for him, but it also means that I view all others through him. I no longer view anyone through a fleshly, worldly, what’s-in-it-for-me lens, but through Christ. I no longer view anyone through the old way common to all sinful people, but through the eyes of a new creation in Christ. How is that possible? The changed way that I live and the changed way that I view others come from the fact that God reconciled us to himself in Christ. In Christ, God made peace with us, even when we were dead, foolish, hostile enemies. That same God has now entrusted to us **“the ministry of reconciliation.”**

That ministry, that service is to share with the world how Christ reconciled us with God. That message has been entrusted to us to speak to neighbors and friends and family and classmates and co-workers. That message is the only message that brings real reconciliation and peace to people of different backgrounds, cultures, nations, languages, political views, and social strata. That message is simply this—For us, God made the One who did not know sin by personal experience (as we do) to become **“sin for us.”** God covered Jesus with our sins and covered us with Christ’s holy life and death and resurrection. Now God sees us through Jesus’ holiness.

Why? Well, that answer goes back to God’s gift of grace. God reconciled us that we might become **“the righteousness of God.”** For what purpose? As God’s holy ones, his saints, we bring true reconciliation with God to the people around us. All of it is wrapped up in the grace of our God in Christ. So how do we respond?

We respond with praise. We respond with proclamation. We respond with encouragement and instruction.. We respond with confidence that the Lord changes hearts through his gift of grace in Christ. We respond like the Apostle Paul, **“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”**

*Hear now readings from 2 Corinthians 5 and Ephesians 3.*