

+ Lesson Introductions + 9th Sunday after Pentecost: 2014 Hymn Festival + 10 August 2014 +

+ Part I: God's Grace Through Christ Alone to the World +

Psalm 72:1-19 – When you hear the word “justice”, you probably think of a criminal getting what he deserves or a defendant being justly declared not guilty. You probably don't think of grace—mercy shown on the undeserving. So you read these words of Psalm 72 and King Solomon describes a King who was going to carry out God's “justice”. Yes, this King comes in holiness to crush those who oppose and defy the true God, but yet God's justice is different. You see, this King in his justice declares the undeserving “not guilty”. This King in his justice declares the wicked forgiven and “innocent” in God's sight not because of what they have done, but because this King comes to pay the full price for the sins of the world. He comes to deliver those who are afflicted with guilt, to deliver those who are spiritually hurting and starving and oppressed. He comes to “*save the needy from death*” so “*all nations will be blessed through him*”. This King's “justice” flows from God's undeserved, self-sacrificing love for the souls of this sinful world. So our gracious God sends this King, unlike any who have ever lived, and that King comes to save his people from their sins, to bring them the rich blessings of forgiveness and peace and life, to bring God's justice, his grace to our world.

Hear now a reading from Psalm 72 – Hymn: CW 363 – The King of Glory Comes

Matthew 27:33-54 – If you want to see what God's compassionate love and gracious mercy truly look like, then look at Jesus. See Jesus and see God's gracious love and mercy for the world. See what Jesus came to do and what he accomplished for you and me and all people. See “*the Word become flesh, and make his dwelling among us*” as God himself becomes a human being like you and me, yet without sin. See him grow up through infancy and childhood and adolescence and finally adulthood, where we see him eventually make the long, difficult journey to a hill called Golgotha and a cross. See the impossibly dark stains of your sins washed clean in the blood of Christ. See in Christ, God's grace, God's love in action for the world. See how much God loves this world not just in paying the full price for all sins, but even conquering death on Easter morning. To Christ alone be glory and praise for being God's grace in the flesh for our world!

Hear now a reading from Matthew 27 – Hymn: CW 103:1,2,5,6 – Glory Be to Jesus

+ Part II: God's Grace Through Christ Alone to Me +

1 Peter 1:18-21 – So what does God's grace through Christ alone have to do with me? Well, let's go back to that historical account of Jesus' suffering and death on the cross. You can clearly see that Jesus died on the cross. You can clearly see that it was neither an ordinary death nor an ordinary execution. You can even clearly see that creation responded when Jesus' life came to an end and the Roman centurion—surely not a Christian before that—recognized that Jesus was, indeed, the Son of God.

...But what does all that have to do with you? Take a closer look at the blood of Jesus that was so liberally poured out on that cross and through eyes of faith, and see something worth more than all the silver and gold in our world. In that blood shed on the cross, you see through eyes of faith the ransom price for your soul, for your forgiveness, for your hope, for your life—not just for the world, but for you. There on the cross God demonstrated his own love for you in this—he sacrificed his one and only Son that you might live through him. That blood of Jesus washes away all your sin. Through that blood of Jesus graciously poured out for you, you have peace and hope and faith in him and life eternal. Such grace can't be found anywhere else.

Hear now a reading from 1 Peter 1 – Hymn: Nothing But the Blood of Jesus

Ephesians 1:3-14 – Do you ever wonder how you got to this point, to this moment and place in time? Do you ever wonder why you became a child of God—a son or daughter of the King of kings, a believer and follower of Christ Jesus—when what you are by nature is a dead, hostile, broken sinner? Your natural inclination and mine is to look for some way to take credit. From little on, that's our natural inclination. “Look, Mommy, at what I did!” “Did you see what I did, Dad?” “I earned that diploma...that promotion...that (you fill in the blank).” That's your natural inclination and mine when it comes to spiritual matters too. “I decided to follow Jesus...I chose to let Jesus into my heart...Look what I did, Lord!” Then you read these words of the Apostle Paul and he takes that natural inclination to claim credit for yourself and crushes it in the dust.

Why did God make you his own? He did it “*to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.*” Paul grounds up that natural inclination again and again with God's grace through Christ alone. He'll also do it later in chapter 2. Why? Paul

does it so you and I realize that we cannot take any credit for our faith, for our forgiveness, for heaven. Instead, all of that is ours through Jesus Christ simply and completely because of God's glorious, undeserved grace.

Hear now a reading from Ephesians 1 – Hymn: CW 397:1,2,4,5 – Just As I Am, Without One Plea

Romans 8:31-39 – So what does God's grace have to do with your daily life? Well, what's going on in your life? What's troubling your heart? What's weighing on your mind? What looms in the shadows of your past or in the murky darkness of your future? What threatens to overwhelm and overtake you? Is it money problems or job concerns? Is it marriage or family strife or worries about the kids? Is it health concerns for a loved one or in your own life? Is it the increasing difficulty to live out and talk about your Christian faith in public? Is it guilt for past sins or present sins of weakness? Is it worry or fear? Yet in those dark places, we find out that Jesus makes all the difference in the world. He gives you the strength to cry out into that darkness of worry and fear and pain and sorrow, *"If God himself be for me, I may a host defy!"*

Listen to the Apostle Paul and see what God's grace does in your life. See the God who loves you, who acted on your behalf, who delivered you from that darkness, by enduring the darkness of sin and Satan and death for you. See how Christ your King, your Savior, who took on flesh and conquered death, who cheers your spirit and gives you heaven, holds you in the palm of his almighty hand so that nothing will ever be able to separate you from his gracious love even in the darkest days. That's why God's grace matters every day of your life.

We read and sing responsively a reading from Romans 8 with CW 419:1,2,4,7 – If God Himself Be for Me

Ephesians 2:1-10 – Grace is such a small, beautiful word, yet as we've heard from Holy Scripture and sung repeatedly, it's one of the biggest words of all. In that word "grace" you find the entire Gospel, really all of Scripture because it's all about grace—God's undeserved, self-sacrificing, merciful love for those who deserve it not. Paul makes it clear that apart from God's grace, it is absolutely impossible for us to be children of God. By nature, we are dead in transgressions and sins, constantly gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and above all, objects of God's wrath. A blind, dead enemy of God cannot and will not reach out and invite Jesus into his heart because he is a blind, dead enemy of God (and that is what we are by nature). Yet in spite of our wickedness God's grace through Christ reaches out in mercy to give life to the dead, sight to the blind, and membership in God's family through faith created by his Holy Spirit. God's grace is truly and simply amazing!

Hear now a reading from Ephesians 2 – Hymn: CW 379 – Amazing Grace—How Sweet the Sound