

Sunday, April 7, 2023

First Lesson: Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24

Gospel: Matthew 28: 1-10

Sermon Series: More Grace

Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

On this Easter Day that commemorates the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, we will be embarking upon a new sermon series, "More Grace." This is a four week sermon- series designed to examine how more grace can aid and propel us in our work of seeking justice for all....together.

- In preparation for this sermon series today, we started our journey with Holy Week, in the sermon series, "So this is Grace!"
- My rationale for having us begin our Holy Week journey in this manner, is because as Pastor Caity mentioned on Palm Sunday, typically if one were to ask a room full of Confirmation students or adults

for that matter, “What is grace,” I would imagine that many of us, including myself, may be reluctant to belt out our answers all at once.

- For **the hallmark of Christianity**, would typically explain grace, as Jesus dying for our sins, so that all who believe in Jesus and his sacrificial act done on the Cross on our behalf, would have eternal life...John 3:16.
- And we see John 3:16 really magnified today on Easter morning, for our gospel this morning reveals to us how **late on the sabbath** day, our two Mary’s; Mary Magdalene and the “other Mary”, went to see the tomb, and discover that Jesus dead body was not there!
- As a side note, I’m kind of peeved at this brief mentioning of the “other Mary” in our text this morning, **for as a woman**, I have to name how sick and tired, the names of many courageous, fierce women of faith and leadership, being glossed over

or not even mentioned, time and time again in the Bible —really bothers me!

- Therefore, I just have to take a moment of privilege to try and crack the case for who this “other Mary” is if that’s alright!
- Therefore why Matthew is naming “the other Mary,” is because Mary (Hebrew Miryam) was one of the most common women’s names in New Testament times.
- Therefore, it is not surprising that the crucifixion and resurrection narratives seem to speak of as many as **five separate Marys**.
- For **you have** Mary Magdalene (mentioned in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John).
- **You have** Mary, mother of James and Joseph or Joses (mentioned in Matthew, Mark, Luke).
- **You have** Mary, the wife of Clopas (mentioned in John).

- **You have** Mary, mother of Jesus (mentioned in John).
- Then **you have** this Mary in our text, “the other Mary” (mentioned in Matthew).
- Biblical scholars have noted one other woman, Salome, the wife of Zebedee and mother of James and John, also being mentioned in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
- Putting these facts together, we see that it is likely that Mary the mother of James and Joseph, **was the same person** as Mary the wife of Alphaeus who was called Clopas or Cleopas.
- This would also mean that “the other Mary” that was also mentioned in Matthew 27:61 that was not read today, **was not a separate Mary**, but simply the Mary— **other than** Mary Magdalene, whom he had mentioned a few verses earlier.

- This would then mean that Mary the wife of Clopas, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and “the other Mary,” **were in fact the same person!**
- In learning this, as a reader of the text, I would prefer the writers **to just say that then!**
- **Just say that** Mary, wife of Clopas, mother of James and Joseph **was at the tomb too!**
- Either way, thank you for allowing me to clear that up...because part of our work of justice together in my mind, is to ensure that every one is valued in their proper name, and that everyone has a seat at the table of God’s grace...Amen!
- Therefore continuing on with this conversation, **the hallmark of our Wesleyan Methodist tradition of grace**, would then go onto describe this sacrificial act of grace into three ways; prevenient grace, justifying grace and sanctifying grace; in which prevenient grace is the grace that was before us, while being formed within our mother’s womb;

- **It is a grace** that would then prepare us for that moment of conversion, in which at some point in our Christian journey, the hope is that we would respond and accept this gift of grace from Jesus through our confession, that would then usher us into the **grace of justification**, where you and I are positioned towards God's gracious gift of new life.
- **From there**, you and I then enter into a spiritual journey **of sanctifying grace**, that is essentially a purifying process, that enables us to become more Christlike in all that we do and with all whom we interact with; as we work together to create thy kingdom, come thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven.
- However, even in this five-minute cliff note version of grace, I stopped by to name that this is a lot to wrap our heads around right?
- "For what does any of this even really mean for our lives today," is the question this sermon series will

attempt to address and generate some meaningful conversation around?

- For in a world where there is **more** violence, **more** evil, **more** bigotry and **more** oppression than ever before, such a heavy, somewhat dense explanation of grace, **in my mind**, does not seem to get to the heart of what we are supposed to do with this grace— let alone inform us how we are called live it out?
- Furthermore, how can I be successful in presenting a four-week sermon series on the concept of **more grace**, if we are still not even sure what grace really is?

- **Therefore, I would like to take a stab at simplifying this concept of grace, in a way that will allow us to go deeper in our conversation today and the weeks to come if that is alright?**
- So if we were to just define the word “grace” alone biblically, **it is essentially talking about God's favor or the favor of God;**
- **Im talking about a favor,** that 'formed humanity from the dust of the ground, and breathed into us a living soul.
- Furthermore, the living soul that was breathed into you and I Church family, **is none other than the image of God!**
- Which then means that no matter who we are and what we may have done in our lives; good, bad or ugly—this does not take away the fact **that all of us have the image of God within us.**
- This Church family, is the core foundational understanding of what God’s favor is built upon!



- It is this idea that **God desires to step into each of our situations and make a worthwhile difference.**
- Thereby making grace a true gift to all of humanity, that would give each and every one of us every chance **to be better, to do better, to live out our best selves**— to become the fullness of what it means to be that image of God.
- It is a grace that grants each of us new life in the here and the now and the forevermore!

- **Therefore, by this hopefully enlightened version of grace, that still lines up with everything we learned in our earlier days of our Christian tradition— by this definition of grace, we can then hopefully be able to connect the dots with what our purpose is as seekers of peace, love and justice for all;**
- **For grace with this understanding, should then inform** us why we as a community are seeking mental health reform;
- **Grace by this definition should then begin to help us to understand** why we are seeking criminal justice reform;
- **Grace by this definition, should then begin to help us to understand** why we should be concerned about political reform and healthcare reform, and climate reform, and every other type of social injustice that have essentially ejected droves

of people from being able to sit at the table of God's grace;

- **For by this life applicable understanding of God's grace**, the reason why I submit that Jesus was on his knees lamenting at the Garden of Gethsamane;
- **The reason why** I submit that Jesus was able to then kneel and wash Judas's feet,
- **The reason why** I proclaim that Jesus was able to endure the beatings and cruelty and taunts, that would lead to his ultimate physical execution—is because the people were being prevented from being able to receive this gift of grace in the way God intended!
- Another way of saying this Church family, is that the people were prevented from living out their fullest potential of becoming that image of God that we were all created to be.

- Because I stopped by to also proclaim through personal experience, that when a person has limited to no food Church, **the image of God is being blocked;**
- When a person has limited resources such as shelter, safety, healthcare, overall basic needs to thrive and survive as a human being, **the image of God is being blocked.**
- When there are systems that are designed to keep people stuck in prisons both literally and figuratively, with no real way to get onto the path towards wholeness and restoration, **then the image of God is being blocked.**
- Furthermore, the reconciling loving God that we serve, is not going to allow our free will choices and decisions, **to block God's grace for humanity.**
- The unconditional God that we serve, **is not going to allow our will,** to replace God's ultimate will for

humanity....to be able to flourish in this grace that is offered to everyone.

- It is similar to if anyone were going to call themselves **attacking my** children, or **attacking my** spouse, or **attacking my** momma, or **attacking those** whom I love and call friend, **especially right in front of my face**, I am going to do everything I can to try and keep that from happening.
- I would never go down without a fight;
- I would go Brooklyn on them—whoever it is— **in a New York minute**;
- And I stopped by to proclaim by God's authority, that God feels this way and then some for God's children;
- **For if God** is going to take care of the Lillies of the field,
- **If God is** going to take care of the birds of the air;

- Then surely, surely, surely..God will take care of you and God will take care of me....
- This is why Matthew 6: 33 instructs us then, *to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*
- Furthermore, the implicit charge in this verse I have introduced, is that as we seek God's kingdom, and we discover that God's righteousness is not being honored, or upheld;
- Then we as God's children are called to remove whatever roadblocks, that prevents both our selves individually and our community collectively, from becoming the beloved community we have been called to be.
- This is the essence of what I mean when I declare the need for **More Grace!**
- For people **must be allowed** to be able to restore;
- People **must be allowed** to be renewed,

- People **must be allowed** to be rehabilitated;
- People **must be given** the chance, to become transformed into the fullness of whom they were created to be!
- **Shifting gears just a bit but still staying on topic, I have an important update as it pertains to our recent Church vandalism.**
- The two youth have been identified by our local police department.
- And long story short, we have the opportunity with these youth, to put this concept of “More Grace,” into action with them, as a community.
- I was able to speak on the phone with one of the youth and his grandmother.
- And I have to say, God bless the grandmothers in particular of this world, who seem to be able to help knock some sense into their grandchildren!
- Is there anyone out there who has benefited from having a loving and wise grandmother in their life?

- Well Church family, because of this grandmother, I believe that we are now in a unique position as a Church community, to be able to pour in more grace with these youth and their families!
- I am currently negotiating a conversation with these youth, family and our Church, with the hope of establishing next steps, that will help these youth to be able to step into the fullness of who they are and whose they are...**children of God, created in God's image.**
- Therefore, I will have some communications out soon, for how we all will be invited into this process together.
- For **I am hopeful** that through this process and more, that God will make this concept of grace come alive for us....
- **I am hopeful** that through this experience, that similar to Mary Magdalene and Mary, **wife of Clopas, mother of James and Joseph**, that we



too will discover **the tomb being empty**, not being something to fear,

- On the contrary, **the tomb being empty**, is something to celebrate and rejoice in!
- For Christ is not there,
- Christ is Risen,
- Christ is Risen Today!

**For This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!**