

Sunday, April 16, 2023
First Lesson: Psalm 16
Epistle Lesson: 1 Peter 1: 3-9
Sermon Series: More Grace
Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

We are continuing with our sermon series, “More Grace.” Once again 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.

*And so last week, we began to explore a life applicable definition of grace in which we will delve into more this morning, that would hopefully help us to begin to connect the dots for what Jesus was trying to teach and communicate with humanity when he was here on Earth, and most importantly, understand why the crucifixion, death and resurrection had to occur.

- *For typically in Church culture and history, the sacrificial act of what Jesus endured on the cross, could be summarized as **an act of grace done on the behalf of humanity.**
- *However, what this sermon series will continue to wrestle with and explore, is the question of what does this act of grace really mean for our lives today?
- *For this grace is really some complex stuff for most of us to wrap our heads around.
- *Why do I suggest this?
- *Well just to give a little Church history, there have been at least seven theories and possibly more out there, for why Holy Week even occurred in the first place.
- *For those who have attended our Bible study class at 4:15 on Wednesday afternoon, some of this information will be a repeat, for we had a class that looked at some of these theories in more detail.

* However, I have always wanted to share some of these theories on a Sunday morning, but could never find the appropriate time to do so.

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* Alas now, I believe that this is the perfect time for us to look at some of these theories, with the hope that this might enhance our conversations even further.

* Furthermore, I attribute author and theologian Stephen D. Morrison for giving us a cliff note version of these atonement theories, in which I have captured the essence of in our conversation today.

* Therefore in diving in; one of the earliest theories for the atonement is the **Moral Influence theory**, which simply taught that Jesus Christ came and died in order to bring about a positive change to humanity. This moral change comes through the

teachings of Jesus, alongside His example and actions.

*Within this theory, the death of Christ is understood as a catalyst to reform society, inspiring people to follow His example and live good moral lives of love. In this theory, the Holy Spirit comes to help Christians produce this moral change.

***The second theory is the Ransom Theory of the Atonement, which is one of the first major theories for the Atonement.** It is often held alongside the Moral Influence Theory, and usually deals more with the actual death of Jesus Christ, and what His death actually means and the effect His death has upon humanity.

*This theory essentially teaches that Jesus Christ died as a ransom sacrifice, paid either to Satan (the most dominant view) or to God the Father. Jesus' death then acts as a payment to satisfy the debt on

the souls of the human race, the same debt we inherited from Adam's original sin.

***The third theory, the *Christus Victor* theory of Atonement**, is widely considered to be the dominant theory for most of the historical Christian Church. In this theory, Jesus Christ dies in order to defeat the powers of evil (such as sin, death, and the devil) in order to free humankind from their bondage.

*This theory is related to the Ransom view with the difference being that there is no payment to the devil or to God. Within the *Christus Victor* framework, the cross did not pay off anyone but defeated evil thereby setting the human race free.

- **The #4 theory is The Satisfaction Theory (Anselm)**: In the 12th century, Anselm of Canterbury proposed a satisfaction theory for the Atonement.

- In this theory, Jesus Christ's death is understood as a death to satisfy the justice of God.
- Satisfaction here means restitution, the mending of what was broken, and the paying back of a debt.
- In this theory, Anselm emphasizes the justice of God and claims that sin is an injustice that must be balanced.
- Anselm's satisfaction theory says essentially that Jesus Christ died in order to pay back the injustice of human sin and to satisfy the justice of God.
- **The #5 theory is The Penal Substitutionary Theory, which** is a development of the Reformation where the Reformers, specifically Calvin and Luther, took Anselm's Satisfaction theory and modified it slightly. They

added a more legal (or forensic) framework into this notion of the cross as satisfaction. The result is that within Penal Substitution, Jesus Christ dies to satisfy God's wrath against human sin. Jesus is punished (penal) in the place of sinners (substitution) in order to satisfy the justice of God and the legal demand of God to punish sin.

- **The #6 theory** is The Governmental Theory of the Atonement, which is a slight variation upon the Penal Substitutionary theory, which is notably held in Methodism. The main difference here is the extent to which Christ suffered. In the Governmental Theory, Jesus Christ suffers the punishment of our sin, thereby regaining the favor of God for humanity. However in this theory, Jesus Christ does not take the exact punishment we deserve, He takes a punishment. In this theory, Jesus dies on the cross, therefore to demonstrate

the displeasure of God towards sin. Jesus died to display God's wrath against sin and the high price which must be paid, but not to specifically satisfy that particular wrath.

- **Finally the 7th theory** is The Scapegoat Theory, which has become a modern Atonement theory rooted in the philosophical concept of the Scapegoat.
- Here the key figures Rene Girard and James Allison produced a theory Jesus Christ dying as the Scapegoat of humanity. This theory moves away from the idea that Jesus died in order to act upon God (as in PSA, Satisfaction, or Governmental), or as payment to the devil (as in Ransom).

- Instead, Scapegoating therefore is considered to be a form of non-violent atonement, in that Jesus is not a sacrifice but a *victim*.
- Jesus Christ as victim means that 1) Jesus is killed by a violent crowd. 2) The violent crowd kills Him believing that He is guilty. 3) Jesus is proven innocent, as the true Son of God. 4) The crowd is therefore deemed guilty.
- Furthermore, James Allison summarizes the Scapegoating Theory like this, “Christianity is a priestly religion which understands that it is God’s overcoming of our violence, by substituting himself for the victim of our typical sacrifices that opens up our being able to enjoy the fullness of creation as if death were not.”
- So Church family, I thank you for sitting through all of these theories;

- For if your eyes were beginning to glaze over and your mind began to start wandering off, then my response to you would be to say, “I’m right there with you!”
- For although this could be very informative information for some; for our bible class also enjoyed discussing these theories together a lot;
- I stopped by to suggest that these theories are still very dense and complex; which is why such a sermon series, calling for “**more grace**” is necessary in mind to begin with!
- For part of my main motivation in striving to come up with a more accessible understanding of grace, is because I suspect that part of the reason why Church attendance across the globe is declining at such a rapid rate, is because there is a disconnect

for many of us, as to why this grace should be relevant for our lives.

- For I stopped by to proclaim that **this grace needs to be relevant** in our lives;
- **This grace in fact needs to be just as relevant**, as the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s scholarship on non-violence should be in our lives, because in both instances from my perspective, part of why the world is being governed by such evil, hatred and violence, is because as a humanity, we have subconsciously and/or consciously given up on keeping the commandment of what it means to love God and love neighbor.
- For **part of how** we love God,
- **Part of how** we love our neighbor...

- **Part of how** we love ourselves, is that **we must understand** what it means to be non-violent...
- **We must further understand** our need for grace.
- For once we can begin to wrap our heads around both of these theological concepts, this is how I submit we begin to really understand the true celebration of Easter;
- **This is how we** begin to really understand why it is so important that the tomb was empty.
- Which is why our working life applicable definition is something that I am excited about— that states that **God desires to step into each of our situations and make a worthwhile difference in it.**
- In other words, **regardless of what** atonement theory may have gotten our attention earlier in this

sermon, **and regardless of the theories** that may simply not have made any sense to us at all—the important discovery in all of this, is that all theories I have named, would allow this affirmation to reign true for each and everyone of us;

- This idea that God wants to make a worthwhile difference in each of our lives; thereby (as I also reiterate from last week’s conversation,) **making grace** a true gift to all of humanity, that would give each and everyone of **us a chance to be better, to do better and to live out our best selves**—to become the fullness of what it means to be that image of God we were all created in.
- **It is a grace** that grants each of us new life in the here and the now and the forevermore!
- You see Church this in a nutshell is the revealed grace that is occurring in both of our lessons of

scripture today, that I have been inherently drawing upon in our entire conversation.

- For in the first lesson of Psalm 16, we are seeing a psalm of confidence, where our psalmist, even in the midst of trials and suffering, expresses a confidence in God that will save both him and his people.
- For part of the saving work that is being named in this psalm, is not just referring to the salvation of the soul, that will allow the soul to live on in the forevermore;
- On the contrary, the psalmist (which most biblical scholars would name to be David), is expressing this understanding of a saving grace in his current situation.

- For in spite of the trials and suffering, that was both a mixture of drama that David had brought onto himself and the trials and tribulations that comes from just living as a whole; for as a side note, our 4:15 Bible class got to really learn all about David's drama in our study last week on 2 Samuel 11;
- **Therefore, in spite of all of this,** David understood that he could take refuge in God.
- Furthermore, when you and I choose to take refuge in God; **essentially we are choosing to take refuge** in the God (who as I bring our working life applicable definition of grace back into this conversation again); we are referring to a God who desires to **step into each of our situations and make a worthwhile difference in it.**

- Which means that with our acceptance of this grace; **God is waiting** to step into our households **and step into** our relationships with one another;
- **God desires and is waiting to step into** our workplaces and **step into** our schools;
- **God desires and is waiting to step into** whatever areas of our lives, that we need some real transformation in; to show us the path of life and discover the fullness of Christ's joy in it (v11 of our first lesson of Psalm 16.)
- Furthermore why I selected 1 Peter 1: 3-9 as our second lesson of focus this morning is because Peter, the writer of this letter shows us that **living out this grace is possible!**
- You see, it's time for a little story time, for this is where we get to the good part of this message;

- For The Applying sermon to life class wanted to know which Peter was this in our Epistle lesson this morning; mainly because you don't hear many sermons on 1 Peter.
- Some of our class participants were amazed that the Peter who was the writer of this epistle, and Peter who denied Jesus three times...was the same Peter.
- Furthermore, there is a 2 Peter, where most scholars believe a different author wrote that book....
- However, most scholars agree that Peter, who has graduated from being that awkward disciple who often suffered from "foot in mouth disease," into becoming St. Peter the Apostle, wrote this book.
- This is a long way of my saying, "**Way to go Peter!**"

- For somewhere in his spiritual journey, the lightbulb came on for Peter;
- For here we see Peter addressing the communities in Asia, Minor, whose members appear to be Gentile Christian, owned by or married to non-Christian men; testifying to this community about the new birth and the living hope through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- You see Church, before, when Jesus was physically here on Earth, Jesus would try to communicate this message of new birth and resurrection on transfiguration mountain and other instances, and Peter didn't understand.
- Now, we are witnessing the contemplation of God's grace causing Peter to praise God, as the Author of salvation and the Source of hope.

- **Peter's interaction with this community reminds me of a similar revelation that I witnessed at one of the small group tables I was sitting at in our Wednesday Night Applying the Sermon class this past week.**
- For we were all sitting around the table, reflecting on the sermon from Easter, and one of the newer participants Wesley chimed in and said, "Yes I understand all of what you all are saying and doing here, but I don't believe that I deserve grace."
- So the table paused our conversation, and another student chimed in and said, "Yeah I feel that way too sometimes."
- And so I decided to take the working definition of grace that we all have been talking about and decided to frame our working definition in the form of a question instead;

- So I asked Wesley, “Do you believe that God desires to step into your situation and make a worthwhile difference in it?”
- Wesley said yes.
- I asked him, “Do you believe that you and every one else deserves every chance **to be better, to do better, to live out your best self-**to become the fullness of what it means to be that image of God you were created in?”
- Wesley said yes.... More enthusiastically at this point;
- Then I said, then this is God’s Grace...**and I could see the light bulb** come on for him and at that moment he said excitedly, “Kirstie, you got me there! I get it and know that I am deserving of God’s grace!”
- And I don’t know Church, it was at that moment, that for me it emphasized why our work by this

definition and understanding needs to keep happening...”More Grace!”

- For it was at that moment, that it became crystal clear why what we do as a church community is so dire and important for such a time as this;
- For the lightbulb needs to come on for many broken people in our community and beyond—to let them know, the good news!
- That all of us have may have fallen,
- However, by God’s grace and mercy, we all have been given the chance **to get back up again;**
- **By God’s grace,** we all have a chance to rise up again;
- So our work must be **in turning the light bulb on,** for our youth and children, who are suffering from depression and bullying and contemplating their human worth and existence;

- Our work must **turn the light bulb on**, for those suffering in the prisons both literal and figuratively;
- Our work must **turn the light bulb on**, for those suffering from lack of mental health resources,
- Our work must **turn the light bulb on**, for every person who has been alienated, isolated, and discriminated against;
- Our work must **turn the lightbulb on**, until the last couple of verses of our Epistle lesson awakens within all of us ;
- Where although we have not seen him, we love him; and even though we do not see him now, we believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy,

9 for our light bulbs are now on; allowing us to receive the outcome of our faith, the salvation of our souls.

* And so I end with this picture that Wesley insisted on taking with Caity and I, after that signal moment that happened at our table!

* I stopped by to proclaim “Way to go Wesley...for your lightbulb is now on!”

* For Christ is Risen

- Indeed Christ is Risen Today
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