

Sunday, April 23, 2023
First Lesson: Acts 2:14a, 36-41
Epistle Lesson: 1 Peter 1: 17-23
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 might aid and propel us in our work of seeking justice for all....together.

And so for our conversation this morning, I feel led to reiterate the life applicable working definition of grace, that hopefully I by the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit, made a strong enough case for in last week’s sermon, as being something that our community can really begin to wrap our heads around; that states that;

God wants to make a worthwhile difference in each of our lives; thereby 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; thereby making our work as a community, **to ensure that each and every one of us, has the opportunity to access this grace!**

Which means that as a community, our work involves, making space for this grace to become accessible for all, including ourselves, by working tirelessly, **to remove those roadblocks—** that might hinder us from flourishing in the ways that we are called to flourish;

As a community, our work involves, being a part of a movement, that works towards turning the

metaphorical lightbulbs on within us all; **to learn what it means** to not only accept and receive this unearned grace that is granted by God—but the hope is that our life-long purpose becomes being a living witness of extending this same grace towards others.

For me Church family, **this is the heart of** what it means to be a **reconciling Church and community**;

For to be a reconciling Church in my mind , means **to restore friendly relations** (which is the definition of what it means to reconcile) between the community and God; which in this case, I am naming God to be the Church, who is supposed to teach the ways of how we are to connect with God, through our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness.

However, as I stated time and time again, somewhere, somehow, the Church's narration of God and the nature of God, has blocked many people from being able to have a true relationship with our Creator.

For I have personally interacted with many people, who are no longer part of church communities, mainly because they are not clear about how God truly feels about them.

I have deduced that this is so, mainly because of some of the biased ways the Church as a whole, have communicated God's message towards these individuals, thereby leaving many people **to spiritually fend for themselves.**

For I believe with my whole heart and soul, that **you and I cannot spiritually fend for ourselves;**

Furthermore, the great commission of the Church does not instruct us **to have people spiritually fend for themselves;**

On the contrary, the Great Commission of the Church, urges her apostles (that includes us today in 2023), to make “disciples of all the nations” and “baptize” them.

All the while living out the essence of John 15:5, that states that *Jesus is the vine and we are the branches; and through Christ, we all will bear much fruit.* (John 15:5)

So what this scripture means to me in our context of what it means to do the work of Justice, is that when sections of our society are not given the opportunity to bear their fruit, then this becomes our work; **to do all that we can to restore this connection, so that**

the people can have every chance to bear their fruit.

Furthermore as one of the spiritual leaders of this community, this is why I have **made it my personal business**, to do everything by God's grace and mercy, to help firstly remind people that they have fruit to bear and to secondly, encourage people to bear their fruit.

I guess this is a long way of my naming, that if I could wave a magic wand to create a just world, "I would design a world, **where everyone would win!**"

And just to be clear on what I mean when I suggest that **I want every one to win**, I stopped by to name that there are two definitions to the word win;

To win by definition 1 means to be successful or **victorious** in.

To win by definition number 2, means to acquire or secure as a result of a contest, conflict, bet, or other endeavor.

So the definition that I am leaning on in this sermon is definition number 1 Church family;

For **I want** everyone to win.... in the name of love;

I want everyone to win, in their career aspirations;

I want everyone to win, in their relationship goals and family goals;

I want everyone to win, in their friendships and in their partnerships

I want everyone to win, where none of our youth and children would **ever have to** worry about being bullied.... ever again!”

I want everyone to win, where people could just live out their best spiritual gifts and lives, **and not have to worry** about gaining proper access to food, shelter and healthcare on every level.

***I want everyone to win...** furthermore, **I sincerely believe that God wants everyone to win**, including the fish of the sea and the birds of the air....because the Word tells us in Genesis 1:28; *And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the**

fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth....

For me this means by definition one...**that God wants everyone to Win.**

Therefore Church family, this is what I believe is at the heart of our two lessons of scripture this morning;

Peter too was frustrated and lamenting over the fact that God's vision of everyone winning, had been jeopardized.

For looking at our first lesson of Acts 2 to start off with; when verse 14a stated that Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, then jumping to **36** "Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified;"

I am immediately drawn to the last portion of verse 36, where it states, ***This Jesus whom you crucified...***

For in many ways when Peter was naming the crucifixion of the Lord and Messiah; not only was he naming that there was guilt in those who killed a man, the Son of God, as if that wasn't problematic enough;

Peter was also naming that there was guilt in those who killed a dream...

I'm referring to a dream established by our Triune God, that was prophesied in Isaiah 61:1 and verbally declared by Jesus in Luke 4: 18; that stated that ***I have come to heal those who are brokenhearted, to announce that captives will be set free and prisoners will be released.***

For as I continue to put Peter's words into my own words, while including some of our Wednesday Night Applying the Sermon's voice in here too, Peter was saying to the people,

This Jesus in whom you have crucified, has now resulted in grace being unfairly distributed to everyone ;

For now, the poorer remains poorer, while the rich gets richer...

Now, there will be those who can eat with around 330 million pounds of food being wasted across the U. S everyday, meanwhile there are folk that will still remain hungry.

Now, God's dream of everyone winning is being delayed.....I'm still in the text....

And the Disciples response to Peter comes up in verse 37 of our first lesson; *Now when they heard this, they were **cut to the heart** and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?"*

38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And so you see Church, although I have been hard on humanity in this sermon, this is where I am getting a little excitement and hope as a reader of this text;

For where my hope in God's saving grace lies, is in the portion of the scripture that named that after the people heard all that Peter had said, **they were cut to the heart.**

For in stepping into our world for just a moment, I am observing that there is so much senseless violence out there—there is so much senseless hate ...

Not to mention, I am still reeling over the news of the recent individuals for instance, the first being a teen boy accidentally ringing the wrong doorbell to pick up his younger two brothers and getting shot but survives, the second was the 20 year old woman getting shot and killed for accidentally driving in the wrong driveway;

Church family this is a long way of me naming that we are faced with so many random acts of violence and so many instances of hate on a daily basis, **that the human spirit** has seemed to become numb to**that the human response** seemed to have become conditioned to it...

So to read that the people were **cut to the heart** is refreshing...

To read that the people were **cut to the heart**, is why I keep choosing to do what I do...

For the type of leadership that I aspire to model, is one that will lead people who are **cut to the heart**, and have decided not to become a part of the problem; on the contrary they have committed to beginning the work of becoming a part of the solution!

Therefore as I still stay in this text of Acts this morning, when Peter said to them in vs 38; Peter said to them, *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit;* you and I are seeing a similar leadership model unfold in Peter;

For Peter was inviting the people to become part of a solution!

Peter was inviting concerned, **cut to the heart** people, to be baptized in a community, that would commit their prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness, through water and the Spirit of God, to become a part of the solution.

And so then the lesson ends with the people who were **cut to the heart**; in vs 41; welcoming his (Peter's) message and were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

And how our Epistle of our second lesson fits in, for as a side note, I highly encourage you to revisit last week's sermon where I really break down 1 Peter, for I believe that the sermon from last week, will really bring more context to verses 17-20 of our Epistle lesson today;

However, what I will note in this text, that if you tuned in last week with us, you will see that the time that I spent on talking about the 7 atonement theories, really paying off now;

For in this epistle, we are seeing one of those atonement theories being named in our passage today; the Second Atonement theory, which is the **Ransom Theory of the Atonement**, that essentially teaches that Jesus Christ died as a ransom sacrifice paid to God.

However, the main point I want to really highlight today in light of our discussion of our first lesson of Acts, is that how I see these two lessons connect for us, is that now we are seeing what happens when the people who are **cut to the heart**, begins to respond to all of the injustices and evil of the world.

For verses 21 in our Epistle lesson today reveals Peter testifying to the reclaimers of justice, who were brave enough to respond to the troubling in their hearts and souls; Peter said, *Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.*

22 *Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart.*

23 *You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.*

This Church family, is a long way of Peter naming in my own words to the people, your efforts will not be in vain...for **your love will win.**

Peter was essentially saying to the people, if you make *God's business about Your business, if you*

just step out of the way, so that God can step in the way, if you can just take this gift of grace, so that I can teach you how to then extend this gift of grace....your love, which is my love, and my love, which is your love...will be the love that wins!

So at this point, I am believing that some of us are becoming energized by this revelation.....

At this point, my prayer is that some of us are becoming hope-filled by this declaration...

Thereby making the million dollar question become , “How do we lead ourself in a way, where we walk into this truth that love wins?”

“How do we conduct our actions, thoughts and ways to align in a way that reflects that love wins?”

And so I will conclude this message with something I was inspired by from Matt Talbot’s Kitchen and Outreach, as I have watched my husband transform

into an even more effective, loving leader and servant and husband for Christ.

For I mainly attribute Stephen's spiritual growth, not by what we just do here at First United Methodist Church of Lincoln, NE, but also from the key training materials that Matt Talbot's requires of all leaders and volunteers who work with the homeless population.

For typically, homeless populations across the globe, are one of the most undermined, misunderstood, overlooked, mistreated and marginalized sections of our worlds and communities.

Therefore one of the training nuggets that Stephen has received that I believe should apply in the Church, is inviting the leaders/volunteers of this work, to understand that because of the sobering realities that I just shared regarding this section of

our society and communities, when one act of injustice is done towards this community, there needs to be 5 actions of grace, love and repair, that would need to be extended, to even begin to reset the harm that was done towards the affected individual/individuals in the first place.

Thereby making the work of Matt Talbot's to be one that doesn't perpetuate the offensive behavior in the first place!

And how I know that this community walks their talk, is because first off, I feel the love when I walk in the room.

However, there was a recent communication/training model that I was simply moved by, that sealed the deal in my mind and heart that Matt Talbot is the real deal;

For it was a recent email that went out to the staff of Matt, Talbot's that I was blessed to learn about.

It was a communications charter that was sent out to the team that served as an agreed-upon set of guidelines, that set expectations and practices for how to communicate, collaborate, and work together effectively and efficiently.

Therefore some key things that were included was for instance; As a team, they would commit to a supportive tone being used in all communication with co-workers, volunteers, guests, and community members. For in the Matt Talbot organization, they always assume a positive intent.

As a team they understand and commit to Confidentiality being maintained in all areas where guests or clients are present.

- There is a policy that staff is not required to read or respond to emails, texts, or phone calls outside of work hours or when using paid time off.

There was a Rules of engagement section during meetings that included being open, honest, direct, and respectful; allowing one person to speak without interruption; ensuring a safe environment; and being mindful of confidentiality.

And there was so much more that I will not share, for I think I made the ultimate point that the Holy Spirit wanting me to make....and that, this is how we as a people demonstrate More Grace.

This is how we as a Church congregation practice More Grace...

This is how we as a community extend More Grace...

This is how Love Wins!

Oh Lord May the Words including the tone from all of our mouths, and the collective movement of love that reigns in our hearts, be acceptable in your sight ; oh Holy One, the Rock in which You Built Your Church! Amen!