

June 18, 2017

Matthew 9:35-10:8

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Grace! That's a word we toss around quite a bit in the church. Sermons are often filled with that word repeatedly. It's what Martin Luther experienced following his reading and study of our text from Romans. Yet, what exactly is grace?

The Apostle Paul spells it out succinctly. Grace first and foremost is from God. Grace is knowing we stand before God as sinners and then, through Christ's death and resurrection, obtain the inheritance of forgiveness and eternal life all because of what he has done. Grace is the gift of the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts so that we may comprehend the magnitude of this most precious thing. Grace is coming to the table of the Lord knowing we don't always get this discipleship thing right, knowing we don't always love our neighbors as Jesus commanded us to, knowing we so often fail to put our full trust in God, knowing we don't always speak out against injustice, knowing we fail to see, hear and respond to the cries of 65.3 million refugees worldwide forcibly displaced from their homes<sup>i</sup>, or that we so often sit idle while 42.2 million people in this very country are deemed food insecure<sup>ii</sup>, knowing we have hurt one another, or said

something false about our neighbor, or come simply feeling like a lost sheep in need of once again being found by the Great Shepherd. Grace is coming to the Shepherd's Table and being forgiven. Being welcomed. No questions asked. No judgement cast. No down-payment required. No ticket needed. No checklist to be completed. Pure and simple grace. Freely given. Forgiveness granted. Eternal life promised. The compassion of Christ experienced in this healing that takes place setting our mind at ease. Freeing us from the guilt we may harbor. Setting loose the chains that may bind us. Opening us up more fully to the unfathomable nature of God's great love for each of us and for all God created. That's grace. Jesus says as much in the last words of our Gospel passage, "You received without payment." Or as the New International Version (NIV) translation states "Freely you have received."

Grace is truly something to behold. In the words of the psalter, what God has done and is doing is something that warrants our response to "make a joyful noise to the Lord" or once again as the NIV translate, "Shout for joy to the Lord." How many times have us Lutheran's shouted in our worship of God? That's one of the reasons why Vacation Bible School brings so much life to me personally and to all who serve at VBS. Being present with 40 children is exhausting. Each year I have a new respect for educators, daycare providers, and all who work with

young children on a daily basis. They need to be monitored closely. They don't always follow directions very well. And yes they are loud, often shouting, even in church. In this very space. They aren't shy at expressing what they are truly feeling. How the love of God being poured into their hearts simply makes them shout for joy. Loud. For all to hear. Probably even those in nearby homes. They are being opened up to grace.

Grace is hearing how much God loves them. Hearing how much God loves all people. How much God loves each of us. It's knowing you are precious in God's eyes even when those closest to you may say something else. "You will never amount to anything." "You are worthless." "You aren't smart enough." "You can't do that." Grace is being freed from the demands of the law and knowing we are made right with God because of Jesus. Grace is living in the knowledge we are never alone.

Grace runs rampant throughout our texts this morning and yes it's in our gospel passage. At the very end in Jesus' final words indeed. But also in so many other places. "When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them." Grace is knowing Jesus sees us first. The Lord of all has his eyes set on us and all people when others fail to see. When others judge. When others deem we don't live up to their expectations. When we don't even see ourselves as God sees us. Jesus

sees us and his response is always with compassion. With love. With grace.

Grace is being lost and then found by the Great Shepherd. But then Jesus goes on to say something else, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” And then he follows immediately with these words, “Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.” And in verse five of chapter 10, “These twelve Jesus sent out.” In the chapters preceding our gospel text Jesus has been doing what he now commissions the twelve to do. Listen to his words once again in the opening verse of our gospel, “Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. Nearly identical words as those he calls the twelve to now take part in. The twelve who, as we know, have at times failed miserably in this calling. One that will soon deny him 3 times. One that will betray him. One whom is a tax collector working for the Roman government and despised by so many. All who will desert him as he hangs upon a cross extending wide his arms of grace.

Grace is knowing all of this and nonetheless he continues to equip and send them out to be partners in His mission. Grace is the exact same call he summons

us to. The very same mission he sends us out to partner in. So many times I think we get it wrong – myself included. We view discipleship as a chore. We view it as one more thing in our already busy lives. We view it as someone else’s responsibility. We view it as if we aren’t qualified. We view it as we might fail. We view it as scary and wonder if this is truly where the Spirit is leading us. But how often do we see it as grace? Pure and simple grace Jesus extends to us, even while we are still sinners, the calling to come alongside him. To join to the work of His father. God’s work. Our hands. Our hymn of the day we will soon sing sums up grace and our response to it, “Hallelujah (which means joyous praise to God)! We sing your praises, all our hearts are filled with gladness. Now he sends us all out, strong in faith, free of doubt. Tell to all the joyful gospel.”

We are filled with His grace, live by that grace, and called to share in the mission of that grace. As we have been doing the last couple of weeks, let us affirm yet again Christ’s grace-filled calling to do God’s work. To be Christ’s hands. (Affirmation of Christ Vocation follows)

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/impact-of-hunger/hunger-and-poverty/hunger-and-poverty-fact-sheet.html?referrer=https://www.google.com/>