

“Pardons Unlimited!”

Exodus 17:1-7, Romans 5:1-11, John 4:5-42

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Is God with us or not? Humanity is constantly demanding that God gives us more and more signs that we are not alone in the wilderness, that God is with us, that God will get us to the glory of the Promise Land.

God continually gives us signs of God’s presence and God’s redeeming grace. Water is God’s sign to you. Every time you drink, God is communicating: I am with you, I love you, I am refreshing you. Every tear you shed unites you with God. Tears of sadness echo God’s sadness over every hurt. Tears of joy echo God’s delight over every goodness. As a sign, God set the Israelites free through the waters of the Red Sea. The waters of baptism symbolize that God is with us, that we belong to God’s family, that God is washing away every imperfection. Jesus is living water. The Holy Spirit pours into our soul. Rain nourishes the earth providing life. Water cleans and purifies. Despite all the pollution we do to water, God uses evaporation and soil filtration to purify water for us. Saint Augustine said that the waters of baptism are a sign of God’s redeeming grace offered to all people.

Is God with us or not? God gives the sign of ruah, breathe, Holy Spirit, air. We breathe in life-giving oxygen and breathe out carbon dioxide. God created the earth to continually regenerate oxygen for us. God gives us the sign of light. Each day is a fresh start to enjoy, love and live to the fullest.

People complained these signs are too common. God gives us more radical signs. God gave us Jesus and resurrection to eternal life. People complained these signs don’t renew my daily life. God fills our daily life with grace, smiles, music, art, nature, laughter, food, awe, discoveries, sleep, sports and unique joys for every person. People complained there is so much wrong, hate, and ugliness in the world. God inspires people to have courage, to love extravagantly, to right wrongs, to forgive, to rebuild.

All of these signs reveal God’s grace. God freely gives them. They all wash away what diminishes life and nourish that which enhances life. H. King Oehmig said, “Whenever the grace of God is revealed in our human encounters, we are saying in various ways to each other; ‘Welcome to Heaven’”. George Congreve said, “The meaning of all my life is its capacity of receiving the infinite love of God and of making the best return I can. Love is not only the source of our being, but the substance also.”

Exodus 17:7, 1-7 “The Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?” From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?” But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?” So Moses cried out to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” The LORD said to Moses, “Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.” Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?””

Water is a sign of God’s gracious presence guiding us to abundant life. The Apostle Paul teaches that God supplies all our needs through the saving grace of God. Hope is trustworthy, because God is pouring grace into us through the Holy Spirit.

Romans 5:1-11 “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing

that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves God's love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by Jesus' blood, will we be saved through Jesus from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of God's Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by Jesus' life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

Greg Heric writes, "The strange thing about hope is that the Christian, in the present, actually participates in the thing hoped for in the future." Hope springs from our perceptions of God's grace renewing us, others, and the world. Hope cannot in any way disappoint, because we are currently experiencing a measure of the thing hoped for. God's grace will make all our pure hopes a reality.

We can be certain that all people will live in harmony, love each other, and enjoy peace, because we have fought with someone, broken the relationship, then God's grace enabled each person to forgive and refresh a loving relationship. We can be certain that we will all enjoy abundant, full, wonderful life, because all of us have had terrible, rotten, no good, bad days that have been followed by a magnificent joyful day. We can be certain that all people will be healed and healthy, because we have seen people recover their health. We can be certain that all people will enjoy eternal resurrection life, because Jesus rose from the dead and promises to carry us to heaven. We can be certain that we will be perfect, whole, complete, glorious, because each of us has sinned, experienced God's forgiveness then witnessed God loving extravagantly through us. All around us, and within us, are tiny precursors of our hopes. **Romans 5:5 "Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."**

Jesus is grace personified, living water. **John 4:5-42 "Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to Jesus, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?'" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.'" The woman said to Jesus, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to Jesus, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship God. God is spirit, and those who worship God must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to Jesus, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." Just then his disciples came.**

They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him. Meanwhile the disciples were urging Jesus, "Rabbi, eat something." But Jesus said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of God who sent me and to complete God's work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.'" Many Samaritans from that city believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.'"

Sarah Dylan Breuer wrote, "I meet a lot of people who could rightly be called "church-damaged," people who have had some of their most painful experiences of shame and humiliation in churches, often in God's name. And I've met a lot of Christians whose ability to function as evangelists, as people who proclaim Good News so that others can experience it, is seriously impaired by their concern to make sure that sinners know just how shameful their behavior is, and that they be kept from the center of Christian community. For me, the question about how we evangelize isn't a question of "What would Jesus do?"; it's a question of "What DID Jesus do?" Jesus received the Samaritan woman with such love and such grace that she was profoundly transformed. She had once accepted the village's verdict that she was so unfit for their company that she could draw water only at noon. After meeting Jesus, she's bold enough to demand (using the imperative!) living water from Jesus. By the end of the conversation, she's left her water jar behind and is rushing into the very center of the village, demanding to be heard by those who were once her tormentors. And she IS heard; many believe in Jesus because of the woman's testimony. What transformed this woman could transform our world? The woman at the well was despised by her village, which was despised by Judeans, whose ancestors had been humiliated by Babylonians. From generation to generation, humiliation, resentment, and violence were passed down by people keeping the score so that they could seek to even it. Jesus sets aside all score-keeping, and by forgiving everyone, he makes it possible for all people to forgive—even for self-righteous sinners like us. Jesus received the Samaritan woman with such love and such grace that she was profoundly transformed."

The woman is shocked by grace. Jesus knows she is an outsider. Jesus knows the truth about her sin, brokenness, and baggage; and yet, God's grace is for her. Jesus pours grace, the source of life into her heart, so she can truly live.

Grace is so counter to our being that this woman, like all of us, initially tries to put a limit on grace. The woman asks Jesus to resolve the long-standing and divisive question of who is right: Jews or Samaritans? Where is the correct temple? Jesus supersedes all of that, religion, location, style of worship, faithfulness, liturgy, knowledge with grace. True worshipers worship in spirit and truth. Worship flows from experiences of grace.

The woman tries to put a limit on grace by naming Jesus, by naming God. We wrongly assume that if we name God, we can form an image of God, then we can define God, then we can limit God. Jesus responds. "I am" God is beyond every name, beyond every image, beyond every definition, beyond every limit. God's grace is beyond all.

After the experience of God's grace the woman runs to invite others to experience God's grace. Her testimony is free of answers, definitions, creeds, certainty on theological matters, judgement, a statement of faith, assumptions, ultimatums and threats of hell. Her witness is an invitation and a question. **John 4:29**

"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" She is refreshing, honest about her uncertain understanding. She invites others to arrive at their own experiences of God's grace.

The woman, the disciples, and all people are shocked that the gift of grace, free living water, is offered to each person, to every person. God offers pardons unlimited. God makes hope reality through grace. Why does the church keep trying to excluded certain people, when Jesus freely offered living water to everyone, even the most outsider possible? Per the Old Testament she was the wrong culture, the wrong religion, the wrong gender, the wrong ethnicity, lived in the wrong area, an unrepeated sinner, the wrong everything, yet God's grace was freely offered to her. God's grace is freely offered to everyone? Why does the church keep returning to promoting things one must do before they receive God's grace when Jesus freely healed people and gave living water with nothing being done by the recipient? Why do thoughts enter your mind that someone may be beyond the grace of God? Do you sometimes feel that you, or at least some aspect of your life, is beyond the grace of God? Hear the Good News. God's grace is for you. God's grace is for every aspect of your life. God offers you pardons unlimited. God will more than fully heal your every mistake, brokenness and hurt. All your hopes will become reality. God will make you glorious in ways beyond your grandest imagination. God will do this for all of us and the entire cosmos. Jesus is living water for you. God is pouring grace, the very source of life, into your heart so you can truly live. Alleluia Amen