

“God’s Grace Will Make Everyone Glorious”

Matthew 15:10-28, Romans 11:1-2a & 29-32

Pastor James York

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A person asked her spiritual director. “How do I know when the night is over, and it is day? Is it when the horizon glows?” “No,” said the spiritual director. “Is it when I can see things?” “No,” said the spiritual director. “The darkness is dispersed when you can see even your enemy as a beloved child of God, your sibling, to love and serve.”

Dawna Markova wrote. “May holiness move in us so we pay attention to its small voice and honor its light in each other.”

God’s grace is all inclusive. Grace is the free gift of God’s love that perfects every person and all of the cosmos making all glorious for eternity. In my opinion God’s grace is the most misunderstood truth, eons beyond any other misunderstanding. God’s grace is way too wonderful to grasp; so, we keep trying to do something to earn it, or place some requirement to attain it, or at the very least believe we need to have faith to receive it. However, grace is only truly free if one does not have to do, be, think, or feel anything to receive it.

God’s radical grace obliterates all the walls, barriers, beliefs systems, denominations, and even religions we keep trying to construct to sort people, to judge that someone is beyond God’s grace. God’s love is the most powerful force in the universe. God is a joyful, loving relationship between the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. God is determined to widen the circle of love the Trinity shares, so all are loved. God’s grace is ceaseless, shameless, and inclusive for eternity.

Jesus spent his life trying to help us perceive God’s grace. In our scripture today Jesus does extreme teaching to help us perceive grace. Today we are far away from the context and culture in which Jesus taught. Without a basic understanding of the dynamics, Jesus’ lesson on grace is easily missed.

The Pharisees have been challenging Jesus’ grace at every point. Jesus forgave the unrepentant. Jesus healed those without belief, healed people outside of the faith, healed the ritually impure, and healed those who disregarded the teachings of the church. Jesus kept revealing that God’s grace is for everyone. God loves everyone. God’s grace is so magnificent God will make whole every person for eternity. The Pharisees kept limiting God’s grace to those who are Jews, to those who worship, to those who follow the law, to those who believe and practice their faith.

God’s grace never gives up on anyone, so Jesus keeps trying to help us perceive grace. **Matthew 15:10-20 NRSV “Then Jesus called the crowd to him and said to them, “Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.” Then the disciples approached and said to Jesus, “Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?” Jesus answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both**

will fall into a pit." But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us." Then Jesus said, "Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."

The Pharisees, crowd, and disciples must have all been astonished. The Pharisees elaborate system of rituals that they strived to live every day is not required to be transformed by God's grace. Even sin which defiles does not exclude anyone from God's grace. They all saw Jesus welcome into God's loving family every person that represented Jesus' list of that which defiles. They all saw Jesus heal the murderous centurion's son. They all saw Jesus give living water to the woman at the well who was still living in adultery and fornication. They all saw Jesus eat with a thieving, false-witnessing, slandering tax collector, declaring that righteousness has come to him. In each of these cases we have no record of any of these people avoiding their sinful ways. The healing of God's grace was not conditional on anything. In hopes of us grasping grace God transformed Saul who murdered, stole, lied, and slandered Jesus into the Apostle Paul.

Jesus perceives that no one has yet grasped God's grace so Jesus tries pulling them into his teaching by using some of their judgments, with their esteemed teaching style. Jesus will soon encounter a Canaanite woman. She represents all that is immoral, godless and ritually unclean by traditional Jewish standards. The Canaanites were ancestral enemies. They practiced a different religion. Having a woman approach a rabbi was culturally unacceptable. Having a woman beg for help was shameful. Having a daughter tormented by a demon was believed to mean that the entire house was living in sin. The Pharisees labeled these disgusting people "dogs." Jesus will use this label, "dogs" to pull the audience into his teaching. Jesus uses this label, "dogs" to make it clear that he knows that she is the least deserving person on the planet of God's grace.

Matthew 15:21-28 NRSV "Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But Jesus did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." Jesus answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before Jesus, saying, "Lord, help me." Jesus answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly."

Jesus tore down every barrier conceivable. Jesus reveals an array of grace truths through this conversation.

Jesus knew from the start that this woman had great faith that she would persevere through being ignored and insulted to receive the gracious healing, in so doing Jesus builds up her self-esteem, reveals her gifts, and honors her in front of everyone.

At first Jesus ignores her. Culturally rabbis were commanded to ignore women, so Jesus draws in the Pharisees. Jesus ignored her pulling in the disciples for soon they became annoyed by her, judging themselves better than her, judging that she was not worth the time to have a conversation with Jesus, so they urged Jesus to send her away.

Finally Jesus speaks, "**I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**" Yes, that's right. The Pharisees and disciples are thinking finally he is talking like a true messiah.

After she asks for help Jesus replies. "**It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.**" With this statement Jesus has gotten everyone's full-attention. Finally Jesus sees the world as they see it.

At that time the most admired teaching by the wisest people was done by using sharp wits to match each other word for word. One was especially esteemed if this witty exchange revealed a biblical truth. Jesus sets this woman up perfectly. She does what only the most honored wise, biblical scholar, male is believed to be able to do, with sharp wit she states. "**Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.**"

Boom! In this one sentence grace explodes in wave after wave on everyone. The woman knows that she does not deserve grace yet knows she will receive God's healing love as a free gift. The woman reveals the truth of Jesus teaching and actions. God's redeeming grace freely given to all. The woman wittily reveals the truth of the Old Testament, the old covenant and foreshadows the new covenant. Abraham and Sarah, Israel, God's chosen people, were blessed to be a blessing. God's plan was to pour so much love, forgiveness, healing, blessings, and grace into them that they would share it with the entire world, so all will know God's love and rejoice with God for eternity. They messed up God's plan by trying to keep God's blessings to themselves, by judging others, by excluding some, by putting stipulates on God's grace. In the New Covenant Jesus and the Holy Spirit connect directly with each and every person filling them with grace. This was symbolized by the curtain in the temple being torn in two, so God's grace can freely flow to everyone. This was commanded by Jesus in the Great Commission. We are to share God's grace with all nations, with everyone. The woman wittily reveals the biblical truth of the power and abundance of God even a mere crumb of grace is more than enough to heal and welcome home anyone for eternity.

Jesus' conversation with this woman enables her to realize her gifts and strengths. She is determined, wise, witty, understanding of scripture, humble, compassionate, loving and understands the greatest truth of all God's grace. Jesus elevated this woman from the lowest status to the most esteemed status. Jesus gives her the highest compliment of anyone in all of scripture. "**Great is your faith.**"

Last week we reflected upon Jesus' teachings on the magnificent outcomes of a little faith. Peter walking on water. A seed becoming a tree. Yeast becoming bread. A little faith does the supernatural. We cannot even begin to fathom the glorious manifestations of great faith.

Peter had Jesus attention but turned away to worry about the waves. Jesus later built the church on Peter. This woman unrelentingly clamors for Jesus attention undistracted by barriers, being ignored and insulted. Jesus foreshadows a much grandeur blessing than all the good of the Christian church, God's grace for all.

We, Protestants, celebrate grace by faith alone. Is faith, belief, needed to receive God's grace? The Apostle Paul wrote the following about those Pharisees who did not have faith in Jesus. **Romans 11:1-2a & 29-32 NLT "I ask, then, has God rejected God's own people, the nation of Israel? Of course not! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham and a member of the tribe of Benjamin. No, God has not rejected God's own people, whom God chose from the very beginning. For God's gifts and God's call can never be withdrawn. Once, you Gentiles were rebels against God, but when the people of Israel rebelled against God, God was merciful to you instead. Now they are the rebels, and God's mercy has come to you so that they, too, will share in God's mercy. For God has imprisoned everyone in disobedience so God could have mercy on everyone."**

Synthesis newsletter explains. "Israel will be saved, and their temporary refusal to accept the completion of the Divine plan in Christ would be overcome. God uses human disobedience, that is, disbelief in Jesus, as a means for manifesting mercy. Therefore nothing, not even human disbelief can ultimately prevent God's desire to complete the Divine plan, which is the gift of grace for all."

Julian of Norwich wrote. "I saw that God never began to love us. We have always been in God's foreknowledge, known and loved from without beginning. We were made for love." Each of us, every person has always been loved by God, is loved by God and will be loved by God for eternity. This is the radical power of God's grace, no matter what we do or do not do, no matter what we believe or do not believe, no matter who we are or who we are not God still loves us and God's grace will make us glorious for eternity.

How is it that we so often still live in darkness unable to see every person as a beloved sibling in God's family? How is it that we think we are more powerful than God, that we can limit God's grace to our denomination, to the Christian faith, to any religion, to any form of human action, thought, belief or feeling? How is it that we twist God's grace into telling others what God wants them to do, to judging others, excluding others, fighting others.

There was a man who murdered early disciples of Jesus, who slandered Jesus, who devoted his life to ridding the world of Christianity. God's grace transformed him into the Apostle Paul. There was a woman who was the lowest despised person, a mere dog. God's grace transformed her into a woman of great faith. Each of us will be transformed by God's grace. God's grace is a free gift, no strings attached, no fine print, no requirements, given to all, transforming all into one harmonies, glorious, perfect loving family, God's eternal family. Amen