

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

June 9, 2018

Community Prayer Service

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

We are going to start this reflection with a group project of sorts. I want you to think about phrases you have heard which contain the term “grace”. What phrases come to mind?

OK. Now, did anyone hear anything negative in those comments? Generally, our understanding of grace is tied up in a sense of good will, of safety, or second chances. It’s about moments when we needed an extra hand, space to grow, or when we needed compassionate understanding at a difficult time in our lives.

But, here’s something I have noticed...don’t we often think about receiving grace only when we feel worthy of grace?

I have a sneaky suspicion that more often than not, we don’t feel worthy of good will, safety, or second chances. As though our mistakes have come to define our worth. So, an exercise in naming grace can become, if we aren’t careful, an exercise in naming the things we have fallen short of deserving. In fact, for far too many people, even walking in those church doors is an act of will – of seeking something you aren’t sure exists much less exists for you.

Abundant grace? Amazing grace? Does it feel out of reach? Really, let’s be honest...if you have been told you aren’t worth much, if you believe your life doesn’t have value, why would you ever believe that something amazing and abundant was even possible?

Have you ever heard the statement, “God only gives you what you can handle?” I hate that sentiment. I know people mean well when they say it but If you are going through a difficult time, if you already don’t feel very worthy of grace, then that phrase can sound as though you got what you deserved. The “everything will be alright if you just have enough faith” kind of sentiment. As though there is some divine purpose to pain and suffering. That it was dished out just to see how far you can go before you break.

Folks, that’s not grace. And grace isn’t about worth or how much you can handle. It’s about love. God’s love for you. God’s love for you when you have hit rock bottom, when you have failed, when you have felt defeated and depressed. It’s God’s love for you when you thought you were unlovable. God wants you to live your best, not as a result of the circumstances you have been dealt or as a way to test your resilience or strength of character in difficult times. God wants you to live your best because God loves you and God keeps pulling for you and lifting you up because you deserve every ounce of that love.

Rob Bell in his book Love Wins describes it this way....

“We all have our version of events. Who we are, who we aren’t, what we’ve done, what that means for our future. Our worth, value, significance. The things we believe about ourselves that we cling to despite the pain and agony they’re causing us. Some people are haunted by the sins of the past. Abuse, betrayal, addiction, infidelity – secrets that have been buried for years....Flaws, failures shame like a stain that won’t wash out. A deep-seated, profound belief that they are, at some primal level of the soul, not good enough....

We believe all sorts of things about ourselves. What the gospel does is confront our version of our story with God’s version of our story. It is a brutally honest, exuberantly liberating story, and it is good news. It begins with the sure and certain truth that we are loved. That in spite of whatever has gone horribly wrong deep in our hearts and has spread to every corner of the world, in spite of our sins, failures, rebellion, and hard hearts, in spite of what’s been done to us or what we’ve done, God has made peace with us.”

Grace, therefore, is not the kind of comfort we have to work for. It is instead, God making peace with us throughout our journey and we making peace with ourselves. And here is what we know about making peace – it takes time as we grow into the knowledge and understanding that grace has been poured out for us and is being renewed within us every single day – even the days we don’t feel so worthy.

God just asks that you keep showing up because God has promised to keep showing up for you. That’s grace. Good grace. Saving grace. Abundant grace. Amazing Grace. Amen.