



Sermon by Synod Minister Heather Culuris

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:13--5:1

Life in the present is transitory and cannot compare with the eternal home God has prepared for us. So we do not despair no matter what life might bring because we know that as God raised Jesus from the dead, God promises to bring us into eternal life.

¹³Just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—"I believed, and so I spoke"—we also believe, and so we speak, ¹⁴because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

¹⁶So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

^{5:1}For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Sermon:

A hymn that many of us can sing by heart is Amazing Grace.... "Amazing grace how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see." We've sung this hymn since we've been young, maybe learning it in Sunday school and singing it in worship. Perhaps we've sung it at a moment in our lives when we have

lost someone that we love. The 2nd verse goes on to sing: “’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears relieved; How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!”

This grace that we sing about is the same grace that the Apostle Paul is writing about to the Corinthians when he says: “Just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—“I believed, and so I spoke”—we also believe, and so we speak, ¹⁴because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.” The part in this passage that catches my attention this morning is Paul’s words hoping and praying that grace will extend to more and more people, so that thanksgiving may increase to the glory of God. What does it mean for grace to extend to more and more people and really what is this grace that we as Lutherans talk so much about?

The word “grace” itself is translated from the Hebrew word “*chen*” and the Greek word “*charis*” to mean favor, acceptance, loving-kindness, and goodwill. In the Bible, it is used most often to describe the mysterious, undeserving love that God us in Christ. Grace is often understood as extravagant, unmerited forgiveness, salvation, and protection. Grace, as Lutherans talk about it is an unearned free gift of God’s love and promise.

The Apostle Paul writes about grace many times in the New Testament. In Ephesians 2, he writes, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (NIV). In Romans 3, he writes: “All are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” And in Paul’s letter to Timothy, he writes again about grace: “He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.”

Grace is an important belief for Lutherans. Martin Luther once said: “This grace of God is a very great, strong, mighty and active thing. It does not lie asleep in the soul. Grace hears, leads, drives, draws, changes, works all in people, and lets itself be distinctly felt and experienced. It is hidden, but its works are evident.” The grace of God is strong, mighty, and active. God’s grace is busy hearing, leading, driving, changing, and working in all people.

So what does grace look like in our daily lives? I believe grace can look like forgiveness offered between 2 people who were once estranged. I believe grace can look like the beauty and new life of flowers blooming in the spring. Grace can sound like children's innocent laughter. Grace can feel like the butterflies of new love and the abiding faithfulness of a couple who has been married for many years.

Grace can be seen and known in the sacrament of Holy Communion and baptism. It can be felt in the forgiveness of sins offered in our worship service. Grace can be known through the proclamation of preaching God's word and in the faith discoveries of Sunday School and confirmation classes. Grace can be seen in how you welcome and care for your neighbors. Grace can be known in the ways you reach out beyond these walls.

Today, take some time to consider how you have seen God's grace living and active in your life and in your congregation. Then reflect on how you are being called to live out the Apostle Paul's words so God's grace and love can extend to more and more people, living and serving to the glory of God. Amen.