

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Pentecost Sunday, May 28, 2023

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 370, 369:5-6, 373:1-4, 375, 373:5.

Lessons: Genesis 11:1-9, 1 Peter 4:7-11, Acts 2:1-21.

Sermon Text: John 1:17.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

I suppose many of you have received a gift you weren't sure you wanted and or didn't think you needed. But there is one gift that you really just can't live without. Can you guess what it is? (Pause) It is God's grace.

Part of us says 'Oh, yeah, I guess so.' But do you realize how important God's grace is? God offers and gives you his grace in Jesus Christ. Without God's grace there would be no hope whatsoever of eternal life.

And what is grace? From Scripture we learn it is God's love, his mercy, his lovingkindness and it is really undeserved, considering the fact that we are all sinners. We don't deserve the least of God's mercies, his love, and his grace.

The heart of true Christianity is Jesus Christ and because of what Jesus Christ did for us, we rejoice in the words of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians: *"because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved."* Ephesians 2:4-5 (NIV) And just a few verses later he emphasizes that, telling us: *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast."* Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

So God has all this grace, this undeserved love for you – and for all mankind. How does he deliver it to you? Today let's talk about that idea.

HOW DOES GOD OFFER AND GIVE HIS GRACE?

1. **Not by having anyone earn it, but**
2. **He has chosen what we call "the Means of Grace."**

Grace is defined in Scripture as God's undeserved love that provides free forgiveness of sins, life and salvation for all people. We don't have to earn it. We receive it by faith.

Especially in the book of Galatians, the Apostle Paul wrote to Christians in Galatia and dramatically warned Christians not to be misled into thinking they must obey the Old Testament laws of Moses to earn eternal life. He is astonished that they are so quickly turning away from the grace of God. He warns them not to set aside, not to abandon the gospel of Jesus Christ at the risk of forfeiting and losing the grace of God.

Grace is not one of those things you can earn.

If true Christianity were a religion of works, of having to do "good" things to earn a better life we wouldn't be here today at Christ Our Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church in Mankato. We are here because God

restored the whole truth of his Word, the Bible, through the Reformation. Martin Luther, a doctor of theology, would have been just another monk or priest or maybe some kind of trouble-maker or heretic in the Roman Catholic Church of his day, doing the best he could to earn God's favor. Of course, we don't praise Martin Luther for rediscovering the truth of God's Word. We give thanks to God for leading him into the truth of the Bible.

Remember that grace is God's undeserved love and mercy.

When we look at how scripture uses the word "love" we realize that God is talking about the kind of love with which God loved all of mankind so much that he sacrificed his sinless only-begotten son, Jesus Christ, on the cross to save mankind from an eternity of hell and damnation. (See last Sunday's sermon!)

That is a tremendous kind of love that we humans can only imagine. There is no way we can love like that.

We also use the word mercy to help explain God's grace. Mercy is kindness, and Scripture even uses the word loving-kindness. It is stopping the pain and the hurt and replacing it with love and goodness.

Taken together, words like love and mercy help explain the boundless love of God.

Every one of us, even new-born babies, is completely infected with sin. And sin is a 100% fatal disease – unless God in his grace rescues us from it. Unless we receive God's grace we will die eternally, because the Bible tells every one of us ***"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins."*** Ephesians 2:1 (NIV)

Unless we receive God's grace – with no efforts of our own; unless we receive God's love and grace and mercy, due to nothing we did or can do – we will remain dead in our transgressions and sins. The prophet Isaiah bluntly tells us: ***"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags."*** Isaiah 64:6 (NIV)

Our only hope is from the Bible, God's Word, which assures us ***"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith."***

A baby cannot do anything to earn God's favor. A baby cannot decide to believe in Christ. A baby can hear but cannot comprehend what God's grace is. That is why we rely on God's grace.

2.

So how does God, the loving, merciful God deliver his grace to us? How does God give his grace to us?

He uses something we call the 'means of grace'. What do we mean by the means of grace? The means of grace is that means or method or way or instrument by which God offers and gives us the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. The means of grace is the gospel in Word and sacraments.

God delivers his grace, his goodness, his love and mercy through his Word – his Words in the Bible and his Words in the sacraments.

We remember that the two main teachings of the Bible are Law and Gospel. The Law does not deliver God's grace to us. The Law shows our sins. It is the gospel that shows our savior. It is the Gospel that is the means of grace.

So it is by words that God delivers his grace to us. It is by words in our own languages, something that this very day in the church year celebrates. Today is Pentecost, the day that the Holy Ghost, the Holy Spirit

“appeared” in two very unusual ways. He appeared through the sound of wind and the appearance of fire, tongues of fire that rested upon the heads of the followers of Jesus.

But the very most important part of that appearance of the Holy Ghost is words – the words as you heard in our epistle lesson, that **“each of us hears them in his own native language.”** Acts 2:8 (NIV)

What was the contents of the Word – those words – that they – and we – have heard and hear even this very day? Very simply it is that Jesus died for sin – for your sin, for all your sins. Believe that and live!

The gospel is a means of grace. It is the instrument through which God tells sinners about what he did for them. It is the instrument through which God also offers and gives to individual sinners what Christ did for all. It is the **“message of reconciliation.”** 2 Corinthians 5:19 (NIV) It tells of God’s reconciling man to himself, it offers reconciliation, and it brings it about by creating faith in the heart of the hearer. The apostle Paul wrote by inspiration: **“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”** Romans 1:16 (NIV)

God in his wisdom provided a way that even babies, who can hear words but cannot comprehend them, can receive his grace. When we baptize an infant, we are delivering to that child the grace of God.

And just as the Word of God is applied in the Sacrament of Baptism, the Word of God is also applied in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

So what is a sacrament? We define a sacrament as 1) a sacred act, 2) instituted by Christ himself 3) using earthly elements together with God’s Word, and most importantly, 4) it offers, gives, and seals unto us the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation.

There are two acts which meet this definition: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. In the Lord’s Supper, also called Holy Communion and the Sacrament of the Altar, we receive the true body and blood of Jesus Christ which was given and shed for the remission of sins.

We have learned and believe that Baptism is not just plain water, but it is water used by God’s command and connected with God’s Word. Baptism works forgiveness of sin, delivers from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this.

Without God’s grace we are condemned sinners. With God’s grace we receive the forgiveness of our sins, eternal life and salvation.

God delivers his grace through the sacrament of Holy Baptism. God delivers his grace through the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. God delivers his grace through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, whether you read it or hear it.

And those are the means that God uses to give and deliver his grace to us.

May we always treasure that grace of God and may we also **“grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen.”** 2 Peter 3:18 (KJV)