Series: God’s Grace

Message: 04 Spreading Grace Peace and Truth

Text: John 1:1–18; Hebrews 12:15; 1 Peter 4:8–11

Theme:

Date: June 2, 2019

Location: Christ Community EFC

**If you would, please turn in your Bibles to John 1:4 (p. 887)**

This morning’s message is our 4th and final message in our sermon series on God’s Grace.

Between the Youth/Grad/Promotion Sunday two weeks ago and Dana and I being away last Sunday for a family reunion, I feel it is important to take a few moments here to recap where we have been in the series.

But first of all I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank Pastor Luke for all his work and effort in putting together both of those services.

When we talk about God’s grace, at its core, it means God’s divine work and influence which operates in human affairs, for our benefit and His glory.

For example: our salvation is imposable apart from God’s divine intervention in our lives. It is by grace, God’s work, we are saved.

But as we saw in our first week as we looked at Titus 2:11-14, God’s grace, God’s divine intervention, brings not only salvation for all who will receive it, but God’s grace is also, according Titus 2:12, is active in “**training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age…”**

God’s grace means so much more than forgiveness, as important as that is. Saving grace is just the beginning. God’s grace also teaches us a new way to live.

In week two, we asked the question, “Are You Paralyzed by Grace?”

The path to becoming like Jesus starts with his invitation. In Matthew 11:28 Jesus say “**Come to me.**”

But then in Matthew 11:29 Jesus goes on to said, “**Take my yoke upon you and learn from me**.”

By God’s grace, we are called to come unto Him, and He invites us to join Him in His work.

God’s grace is reflected in our salvation, our sanctification, and our calling—our mission.

In the third week, we saw the connection between God’s grace and humility, along with the great enemy of God’s grace, human pride.

Both Peter and the apostle James draw on Proverbs 3:34, which reads: “**God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.**”

God gives grace to the humble while at the same time He withholds grace from the proud.

C.S. Lewis wrote, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself: it is not thinking of yourself at all.”

A humble heart paves the way for a greater grace.

This week I want us to consider Spreading Grace, Peace and Truth.

You see, having received God’s grace we must extend God’s grace to others.

Here in John 1:14 the apostle John is writing about the Son of God, Jesus coming in the flesh to live among us.

“**And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth**.”

I would put it to you that there is a connection between grace and truth.

John’s gospel reminds us of what is special about Jesus. He came from the Father, “**full of grace and truth**.” In Jesus Christ, grace and truth are joined.

In Christ we find the grace for our salvation. We find the grace that leads us into all righteousness, transforming us from what we were to who we are becoming in Christ.

And we find the grace that calls us to join with Christ in carrying out God’s will and work in the world today, if we would humble ourselves and receive God’s grace.

We also find in Christ truth.

Jesus says of Himself Jesus later in John 14:6; “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me**.”

Jesus embodies the truth, the truth about the Father, the truth about our condition apart from Him, the truth about the Gospel and the new life we are called to, and how we should live now.

And don’t miss this, it is in the Bible, God’s word we come face to face with truth because, through the ministry of the Holy Spitrit, the Bible reveals Christ to us.

So, Jesus’ life and His message show the beauty and the power of grace and truth, walking hand-in-hand.

From Jesus, we can learn something about how to walk and speak in the world today, through grace and truth.

This morning, in this final message of our four-week series on God’s grace, we should learn from Jesus about the power of truth spoken in grace, which leads to peace.

Some people emphasize grace. Others emphasize the truth.

But Jesus showed us that apart from grace, we cannot speak the truth, and apart from truth, we are not really speaking words of grace.

The peace of God comes when grace and truth are joined together.

In Jesus, we see our perfect example. John’s gospel continues with words of grace.

In John 1:14 we saw that Jesus came from the Father, lived among us **full of grace and truth**.

Skip down to John 1:16: “**For from his fullness** [that is, from the fullness of His grace] **we have all received, grace upon grace**.”

The NIV puts that phrase “**grace upon grace**” as “**one blessing after another**.”

I believe John was searching for a way to communicate that God’s grace is deep and multi-layered.

No matter how long we walk with God we will discover again and again the God who beckons us (as C.S. Lewis puts it) to come “farther up and farther in.”

We will never plummet the depths, ascend the heights, nor travers the breath of God’s grace.

But take note! If we are think of grace as merely a ticket to heaven it is as if we have come to the shores of God’s grace only to dip our toes in the ocean.

James 4:6 reminds us, “**But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble**.”

More grace. Greater grace. All the more grace. I believe James was speaking from experience, not theory.

I think he discovered the multi-layered grace of God as he learned to humble himself again and again.

When we humble ourselves, we position ourselves for greater grace.

And when we humble ourselves, we create an atmosphere of peace that allows us to speak the truth, truth that is filled with grace.

Did you know that the apostle Paul opened each one of his letters with the very same greeting? Thirteen times he says, “**Grace and peace to you**.”

Whether Paul was writing to the people of a church, to his “true son in the faith,” like Titus, or even when he was writing to discuss the difference between slavery and brotherhood, his blessing was always “**grace and peace**.”

Some people might think these words are a formality, but these words—even if they were formalities—were breathed out by the Holy Spirit.

In the New Testament epistles, even the greetings are part of the inspired Word of God!

Why would this man of God greet everyone in this manner? What is so important about grace and peace that Paul feels the need to speak the words immediately?

Perhaps we could start here. Paul greeted everyone with “grace and peace” because he understood our ongoing need for both of them.

He was writing to believers, yet he wished for them more grace and more peace.

I believe Paul gave each congregation grace and peace because they were his to give.

In Luke 10:5 Jesus had instructed the original twelve disciples saying; “**Whatever house you enter, let your first words be, ‘peace to this house**’”.

Jesus had in mind something more than words. He observed that a greeting of peace could rest upon the people in that house or return to the one that gave the greeting.

This peace, Jesus instructed the disciples to give was something real, something tangible, no less tangible than handing someone a loaf of bread.

Decades later, Paul wrote to the churches of God scattered across the Roman world, and his first words are “grace and peace.”

Paul possessed grace. He has received more and more of God’s grace and peace. And apparently, he had a surplus; he could give it away!

In many cases, Paul was the founder of the church to which he wrote. He wrote to encourage what was good in these churches and to offer correction for whatever needed help.

How often do we look upon correction and teaching as sources of the peace and grace of God?

For those who have given it any thought at all, God’s grace and peace should be prized above almost anything else in our lives.

Many of Paul’s churches faced persecution from the outside, and some experienced disagreements on the inside.

Paul wanted his friends to experience God’s grace and peace, and when necessary, he brought powerful words of reproof.

From our perspective, centuries later, we understand that each letter was the Word of God, then and now.

Those people who first heard the words of Paul read aloud in the congregation had a choice: They could listen beyond the mere words of the letter, and in so doing receive the grace and peace offered them.

Or, like the homes the disciples visited in Luke 10, they could refuse to receive the grace of God and the peace of God as it appeared to them.

How often does God’s grace or peace appear to us in some form we may not recognize?

We should ask ourselves: Do we receive the words of loved ones as God’s grace in our lives?

Do we ever consider that the instruction we receive from those in authority has the potential to bring God’s peace?

Paul’s words were not only about receiving; his greetings were examples of what we have to give.

Have we received some measure of grace? Of peace?

Jesus had straightforward instructions to his followers, “**Freely you have received; freely give.**” (Matt. 10:8).

If we have received any grace from God, then we have grace to give.

Don’t worry; you won’t run out!

If God has given us peace in any area of our lives, we can give that peace, as well.

One follower of Christ may have learned the secret of contentment with respect to financial matters. Another may have learned how to place everyday fears at the feet of Jesus.

Do we ever consider that the peace we’ve received in our walk with God might be the very thing we can teach others?

He blesses us so that we can be a blessing to others.

Our everyday lives are no different than the times in which Paul wrote his letters. Words of grace and peace are not mere formalities; they are ours to give.

We have something to give. We can give grace and peace. And the world desperately needs grace and peace.

Grace is abundant and free. It’s the deal of a lifetime—no, of eternity!

When we understand God’s grace for what it is, we all want in. Who could be opposed to grace?

And yet there are obstacles to grace. Even more startling, we, ourselves, is what stands in the way of our receiving grace.

In order to bring grace and peace, we should examine ourselves in two areas. Our conflicts with grace are like storm fronts in our hearts.

Here are two examples of obstacles to grace. I wonder if either of these applies to you today.

The first is: ***Bitterness***

The writer of Hebrews says in 12:15 “**See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled**…”

Bitterness is an obstacle to grace. The wounded heart draws inward and avoids even grace itself.

I want to be alone, alone in my pain. But this aloneness is an illusion.

This passage from Hebrews warns us that, apart from the grace of God, our bitterness and unsettled scores seep into those around us.

My bitterness can defile others. We need grace to endure suffering, even in the everyday slights of life.

In our pain, when we refuse grace, we defile many.

All the while, we think we are suffering in silence and solitude, unaware that when one member of the body suffers, the whole body is in pain.

The second obstacles to grace is: ***Scarcity***

This second opponent of grace is my fear that grace is a zero-sum game, that somehow grace comes prepackaged in fixed amounts.

My mind has yet to inform my heart that “**his mercy endures forever**,” and comes in limitless supply.

I am the frightened sparrow who thinks his own small breaths will consume all the air in the sky.

I think whatever grace I find, I must keep for myself. Who knows where I’ll find more?

Yet, if the Father clothes the flowers of the field and feeds the birds of the air, how much more will he provide the life-giving freedom of grace?

Here is the supply of heaven: when I share the grace I’ve received, I discover the Source of all grace, who gives the Spirit without limit.

Part of the good news is that there is more grace; grace for today and grace for tomorrow. Grace for more than forgiveness.

God wants to provide grace in the everyday; grace for growth and grace to sustain.

Grace and peace represent more than our need. They are the need of everyone we meet.

Do we wish grace and peace on others? Do we have it to give?

**Community of Grace: Turn with me over to 1 Peter 4:8-11, (p. 1016)**

Finally, we should understand that there is a place to cultivate grace, peace, and truth. Grace grows in community, but not just any community.

This is a difficult message for many people these days because by *community* I mean *church*.

The same Father God who adopted us into his family intends that we should live together as family.

This is a difficult message because, in modern times, the church of Jesus is largely out of joint.

We have created a Christendom where we can choose churches the way most people choose restaurants, according to our individual tastes.

By most estimates, there are more than 25,000 Christian denominations worldwide. Not individual churches, denominations.

How can we grow in grace when we are free to wander from one family to another?

It’s an old story. Ask nearly any Christian and you’ll hear stories of church drama, church fights, and church splits.

*But it doesn’t have to be like this*.

Listen carefully to the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 4:8–11: “**Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.**

**9 Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.**

**10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: 11 whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen**.

It’s easy to miss the word grace in this passage, but you’ll find it right in the middle, which is where grace always belongs.

Our words and actions are the practical expressions of God’s grace.

God wants to show his grace through the love, hospitality, encouragement, and service in the community of faith.

We extend grace to others precisely because we’ve received grace from God.

Among our families at home—and among the family of God—we are called to be caretakers of grace.

Too often, we have become merely consumers of grace, and it has led to a church for every taste and preference consumers can imagine.

Not only does grace grow in the community we call church, it grows in the most unlikely places of the church, among our shortcomings, our hypocrisies, and failings.

If everyone in the church had his or her act together, what need would there be to extend grace?

Look again at this passage. The apostle Peter calls us to use our gifts in service toward one another.

We steward the grace we have received by the way we speak and act toward others in the church.

Have you thought about grace as a stewardship?

If not, here’s a wonderful exercise: try reading the parable of the talents (it’s in Matthew 25 and also Luke 19) as a teaching about grace.

The master leaves something of great worth with his servants (substitute grace for gold), and when he returns, he looks to see whether we have used his gift wisely.

Best of all is our reward.

In Matthew’s version of the parable, the master not only praises the good stewards, he extends an invitation, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” says the master. “Come and share your master’s happiness!”

When we freely give the grace of God, we will receive his praise, and something more, an invitation to enter into his joy.

Through grace, joy increases for everyone.

**Benediction**

**“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:14)**