

# SERMONS FROM ST. MATTHEW'S

## “GRACE WILL LEAD ME HOME” Romans 5:1-5

God's grace is amazing!

Just take a moment and reflect on the breadth and depth of his grace.

Do you remember drawing your first breath this morning?

Did you have anything to do with your birth?

What about the sunrise this morning?

What part did man have in setting up the world?

What have we done to earn God's favor or deserve all we have?

Did any human being suggest to God how he should arrange to save us?

In the immortal words of St. John:

*<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

*<sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup>He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup>But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup>who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.*

*<sup>14</sup>And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth...*

*<sup>16</sup>From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup>The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known (John 1:1-5,10-14, 16-18).*

And further in the words of Jesus to Nicodemus:

*<sup>16</sup>“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*

<sup>17</sup>“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him (John 3:16-17).”

Two weeks ago we looked at the definition of grace as written in the Catechism.

*Grace is God’s favor towards us, unearned and undeserved; by grace God forgives our sins, enlightens our minds, stirs our hearts, and strengthens our wills (BCP, p.858).*

In addition, we saw that the first three verses of the hymn *Amazing Grace* demonstrated that through grace we are forgiven (v1); by grace we are enlightened (v2); and, by grace we are strengthened to depend upon God (v3). Our conclusion was that grace is the sovereign gift from God by which he enables us, inspires us and strengthens us to live in a reconciled relationship with him.

As we reflect on God’s grace we tend to focus on the saving grace of God, but God’s grace is much greater still. St. Paul starts at this point in our lesson today – “*since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God.*” But not only have we been reconciled to God, a past act that effects our present, we also are given an assured promise for the future – “*God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*” “*Grace will lead [us] home.*” As we sang in the fourth verse of *Amazing Grace*:

*Through many dangers, toils, and snares,  
I have already come;  
'tis grace that brought me safe thus far,  
and grace will bring me home.*

Grace is not only the unsolicited action of God on our behalf, but also the state in which the believer lives. St. Paul, in his Second Letter to the Thessalonians, put it this way: God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit “*through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope*” (2:16). Grace is both the tool through which peace with God is accessed and the gift of a future with God. Through grace we receive comfort and live in hope.

Raymond MacKendree has been quoted in numerous sermons and devotionals as having said,

*The resurrection of Jesus Christ is our hope today. It is our assurance that we have a living Saviour to help us live as we should now, and when, in the end, we set forth on that last great journey, we shall not travel an uncharted course, but rather we shall go on a planned voyage – life to death to eternal living (Queens’ Gardens).*

In writing about this hope, the now retired, Bishop of Durham, N.T.Wright stated it this way:

*Hope is what you get when you suddenly realize that a different worldview is possible, a worldview in which the rich, the powerful, and the unscrupulous do not after all have the last word. The same worldview shift that is demanded by the resurrection of Jesus is the shift that will enable us to transform the world (Surprised by Hope, p.75).*

The life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit all add up to this new worldview of hope, the life of grace. It is the grace that Jesus offered the Disciples when he said,

<sup>1</sup>“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also...

<sup>25</sup>“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. <sup>26</sup>But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. <sup>27</sup>Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you (John 14:1-3, 25-27).

The truth about grace is that God of his own free will and autonomous love intervenes on behalf of sinner. This is first experienced as justification which is the doorway to the Christian life. But grace is also the air in which the Christian life is lived. Not only do we enter a relationship with God through grace, but we can only remain daily in that relationship by grace. It is only through God’s grace that our trials and suffering in this life can draw us closer to God. By grace we have a hope that sees beyond our present circumstances and enables us to depend upon our eternal Lord. The ultimate grace from God is the gift of *shalom*, the peace that is eternal reconciliation with God. The Lord will continue to “*turn his face toward you and give you peace*” (Numbers 6:26) by his grace. Truly “*grace will bring [us] home.*”

Let us pray,

*We thank you, O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you have revealed your Son to us, on whom we have believed, whom we have loved, and whom we worship. O Lord Jesus Christ, we commend our souls to you. O heavenly Father, we know that although we shall in your own good time be taken away from this life, we shall live for ever with you. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Father into your hands we commend our spirits; through Jesus Christ our Lord [and the power of the Holy Spirit]. Amen. (Martin Luther, 1483-1546)*

*Taken from a sermon preached by the Reverend Charles D. Alley, Rector of St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church in Richmond, Virginia on May 30, 2010, the First Sunday after Pentecost (Trinity Sunday).*