

Trinity 18 - 2018

It was not uncommon several generations ago to give girls such names as Prudence, Patience, Chasity and Grace.

Perhaps their parents thought the child would take on the virtue her name suggested
. . . grow into that name.

Did it work? I'm not sure.

I do know a case where it worked in reverse in regard to a family pet. A member of this church, whose name will remain anonymous, named her cat "Brat" and then would get very cross when he did "bratty" things.

One day I told her, "Why are you surprized? If you had given him a nicer name maybe he would act nicer. That is a 'jokey' aside.

I want to speak to you this morning on the subject: "Giving thanks for Grace," not a girl, mind you, but the grace of God.

This theme or subject is drawn from today's Epistle where we find Paul thanking God for the grace he saw at work in the church at Corinth.

He will go on in this letter to chastise his readers for some pretty bad behaviour, but not just yet. Instead, he begins on a positive note, a note of grace.

There is no doubt in his mind, despite their shortcomings, that God's grace is at work in their midst.

Indeed, in no other church that he had founded does there seem to have been as many gifts. It is almost as if they had been 'over served' with grace.

I am going to come back to their situation in a minute, but first, let's think about grace. What is grace . . . God's grace?

Well, the simplest and perhaps the best definition is: **Grace is God's unmerited and undeserved favour.**

Grace equals gift, the ultimate gift being Jesus Christ.

It is through Him we human beings can be restored to a right relationship with God.

Sin like a barrier wall had come between us and our God. But God took the initiative in breaking down that wall. This He did by a sheer act of grace in sending His one and only Jesus to die for our sins.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God,” Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8.

Passages of scriptures such as this led the Reformers of the 16th century to coin the phrase: *sola gratia*, Latin for “by grace alone”. What we could not do for ourselves, God has done for us in a sheer act of grace.

Grace, then, is God’s undeserved favour to Adam’s fallen race. It culminates in Jesus and is bestowed freely upon all who believe.

Let’s return now to Corinth and see how God’s grace was being worked out there.

First, it was something that they had received, past tense.

When Paul preached and they believed, they received a new status. These former pagans were now members of the New Israel of God. Thus, Paul can say: **“I thank my God . . . for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ.”**

Second, this grace was something that continued to be worked out in their lives. **“In every thing ye are enriched by him,”** Paul continues. It was a work in progress.

More than that, they were living testimonies that the Gospel was real and that Paul’s preaching had not been in vain.

No wonder, we find Paul giving thanks.

I feel the same way when I look at the progress that has been made here at St. Luke’s during my 30-plus-year tenure. It’s not of me. It’s all of grace. And with Paul, I can only say, **“I thank my God.”**

I might add: God is not through here at St. Luke’s. There’s new work to be done. God’s grace remains at work among us. So, let’s carry on and not grow weary.

Moving on. So far, we have looked at the past and the present, but Paul also looks forward to the future.

Grace had set their heart a-stir in the beginning . . . grace had kept God's work alive in Corinth . . . and grace was nudging them forward towards a final destination.

Paul calls this final destination "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." For him, the best was yet to come.

That reminds me of a story . . .

Over a decade ago now, an early member of St. Luke's – Glenn Thoreson – left on my desk a piece of paper with a story.

I was not in at time, but found it when I returned.

Not too long after, Glenn died, and I found myself sitting at the same desk trying to decide what to say at his funeral. Casting my eyes around the desktop, I saw that piece of paper and picked it up and re-read the note he had penned on it. It said: "I thought you might could use this."

I did use it . . . at his funeral.

The story was entitled "The best is yet to come."

It recounted a woman's wish that when she died she wanted to be buried with a fork in her hand.

Why? Because, as she told her minister, inevitably at their church potluck suppers, someone would come round and say: "Keep your fork, the best is yet to come" . . . meaning the dessert.

This was her view of life: The best is yet to come. This was Paul's as well.

On that day, we shall have nothing to fear. How so?

Well it is because we will stand before the throne clothed not in the tattered rags of our own righteousness, but in Christ's own righteousness. The cloak of grace will be around our shoulders.

Words of an early 20th century hymn comes to mind:

*Marvellous grace of our loving Lord,
grace that exceeds our sin and our
guilt . . .*

*Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
grace, grace, God's grace,
grace that is greater than all our sin.*

Why not join Paul this morning in giving thanks for the grace God has shown you in your life and in the life of this church? Moment by moment, day by day, He has walked beside us.

And, if by chance, there is anyone here this morning who has not yet been touched by grace. This is your day!

The hymn I have just quoted concludes with an invitation:

*Marvellous, infinite, matchless grace,
freely bestowed on all who believe;
you that are longing to see his face,
will you this moment his grace receive?*

This is your invitation. Accept it. Don't go home without grace. ///

Grace. A lovely name for a girl, but an even lovelier state in which to live one's life, in time and in eternity.