

**Sermon Week 2** **– Real Grace**

***Ephesians 2:1-10***

**Real Grace that Amazes!**

A parachutist jumped from a plane. But when he pulled his rip cord, guess what? Nothing happened. As he plummeted to earth in terror, the thought came to pray. He only knew one prayer, so in utter desperation he cried: "For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful." Miraculously, a tree broke his fall and he lived. His testimony was that he had been saved by grace alone.

As Christians we know that we’ve been saved by grace alone through faith. We trust in the Good News of what Jesus has done for us through his life, death, and resurrection. Every time we gather as God’s people, we celebrate the grace that is ours in Christ.

If we have this good news, then why are many Lutheran congregations declining?

* Perhaps we’ve become so familiar with grace that it no longer amazes us.
* Maybe we have soaked so long in the comfort of grace that we no longer see our need for daily repentance, dying to self, and rising to new life with Christ.
* Perhaps our familiarity with grace has dampened our desire for transformation.
* Do we sometimes think: "Since God forgives me, I don't need to worry about pleasing or obeying God."?

That’s how God's grace is “cheapened”.[[1]](#footnote-1) For God's grace to keep amazing us, we need to know what we’ve been saved from; the cost of our salvation; our identity and destiny **in Christ;** and what God has saved us for.

In Ephesians chapter two, Paul describes our situation and destiny - apart from God. In our fallen condition, we were all dead in sin, compliant with the devil, closed to God, and enslaved to our passions and selfish desires.

And the consequences? **By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else.** (Ephesians 2:2 NLT) In his holy perfection, God cannot pretend that our rebellion and evil don't matter. He **must**deal with it. Since God cannot allow sin-stained humans into his heaven, he could have rightly rejected us from his holy presence forever. It's what we deserved.

**But** (and thank God there is a “but”) **God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!)** (Ephesians 2:4-5 NLT)

In his kindness and mercy, God sent Jesus to rescue us from death and destruction and bring us into his life and love. Jesus' entire ministry was turning messing into blessing. He heals the sick, gives sight to the blind, cleanses lepers, delivers people from unclean spirits, forgives the guilt-ridden, raises the dead, and makes a way for all of us to be made right with God.

At the cross, Jesus took the blame for our mistakes and failures. He took our place of execution - not because he deserved to die - but because his perfect life was the only sacrifice that could atone for our sin. His love moved him to pay the price – for you, me, and every person on this planet.

Through his resurrection, Jesus has conquered death, defeated the devil, and opened the way for us to eternal life. Because of what Jesus has done for us, we are now forgiven and safe in God’s care forever.

 Paul says we have a new identity and destiny: **For he** (God) **raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus.** (Ephesians 2:6 NLT) Did you get that? Jesus is seated at the right hand of God. And where are we? We are seated with Him!

We are no longer sin-stained convicts on death row! United with Christ, you are princes and princesses of the King of the universe. There's a place in God's banquet hall with your name on it. God is going to show us off as recipients of his grace into eternity (Ephesians 2:7). And we will know that the only way we made it there was through Jesus!

Paul reminds us that God’s grace is a gift: **God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.** (Ephesians 2:8-9 NLT)

Imagine you fell off a cruise ship and were left treading water in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. You will soon perish. Miraculously, a ship comes along. Someone sees you, tosses you a life buoy, and shouts: “Grab onto the life buoy so we can save you!”

At that point, would you shout back: “No thanks! I’m going to work this out myself!”?

Sounds crazy, yes? Yet some people reject the forgiveness and future that God offers them in Jesus because they want to work their own way to save themselves.

Let’s say you grab the life buoy - and are saved. Would you later boast to your friends, “My resilience got me out of the mess I was in!”? No, you’d be giving credit and thanks to those who saved you! Your experience could change how you think about the rest of your life: “I must have been saved for a reason.”

Paul tells us that reason God has saved us - what we have been saved for:

**For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.** (Ephesians 2:10 NLT)

Did you catch that? You are God’s masterpiece. Just as a masterpiece reflects the glory of the artist who made it, you and I are to reflect the glory of Jesus.

Grace brings us into life with Jesus as our Lord and Master. As God’s grace and truth works its way into us, the Holy Spirit transforms us – enabling us to bear the fruit of Jesus’ character in our thoughts, attitudes, decisions, words, and actions. Infused with the love of Jesus, we join in God’s story of building up and blessing others.

God has made you a new person in Christ – for a life of good works.

**Good works do not bring us into salvation.**

**But God’s gift of salvation produces a life of good works.**

God has a part for each one of us to play in his restoration story for his world. One day he will bring all things together under Christ (Ephesians 1:10)

In the second half of Ephesians chapter two, Paul makes it clear that God’s gift of grace is for ALL people. The Good News of Jesus is not meant to be hidden inside our church buildings or kept locked away in the privacy of our hearts. God’s grace is to be lived and shared with others. The Gospel is God’s public truth for the world!

Former slave trader John Newton was so impacted by God’s grace “for a wretch like me” that he wanted everyone to know the Good News of Jesus. His song, *Amazing Grace*, has been sung throughout the world. At 82, Newton said, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things, that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour."

Here's another story to take home with us:

There was once a governor who issued a pardon to a murderer who was to be executed the following day. After issuing the pardon, a courier had to travel on horseback to the prison, bringing the official document to the wardens.

However, on the way the man was beaten up, robbed of his horse, and left unconscious. After coming to, he continued his journey on foot, half walking and half running to get there on time. With just over an hour to spare, he collapsed at the prison gate with the document in his hand.

Hours later, one of the prison wardens asked the chap, "Why on earth did you make so much effort for that worthless no-hoper. Everyone knows he's as guilty as sin and deserves to die."

The courier replied, "Sir, you don't understand. I too am a pardoned criminal."

For Christ's sake, God offers his grace to everyone. No one is so good that they deserve it. And no one is so bad that they can't receive it. That’s why real grace is amazing! Amen.

1. In 1937, a young Lutheran theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was deeply concerned about the Lutheran church scene in Europe. He wrote: "We Lutherans have gathered like eagles round the carcass of cheap grace, and there we have drunk of the poison which has killed the life of following Christ." "This cheap grace has been ... disastrous to our own spiritual lives. Instead of opening up the way to Christ it has closed it. Instead of calling us to follow Christ, it has hardened us in our disobedience.... The word of cheap grace has been the ruin of more Christians than any commandment of works." *The Cost of Discipleship*, (SCM 1984), pp. 44 & 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)