

Sermon: “Overflowing Grace”

1 Timothy 1:12-17, NRSV

By Rev. Clarence G. Page

Today, our message is about receiving grace, overflowing grace. We often consider ourselves inadequate in many ways or find it challenging to accept forgiveness. We often find ourselves living as though we can live any way we want. We don't do as we ought, especially in our relationship with God. We often say we love and want to commit ourselves to serve Him, but we are quick to give in and give up. We quickly turn away from Him and turn to our way of living, not pleasing Him. In doing these things, we can become self-centered and self-focused, and not only that but also start delighting ourselves and desiring Him less and less. And, from time to time, we tend to let our doubts and fears hinder trusting that we can change or have changed and moved to a better way of living. It's not always easy to let the past go or our wrongs, but we can move on. With God's grace, we can move on. We can let go.

In our text, Apostle Paul, a Pharisee, heard about Jesus but didn't believe nor accept Him until his heart changed and he received a new life in the Lord. He wasn't a follower nor a believer, but a condemner, a persecutor. Paul didn't care nor understood Jesus as divinely sent from God. He condemned Jesus' followers and doubted their faith and teachings. And one day, Paul decided he had enough of those folks committing to following Jesus. So, what did Paul do? He went to stop them and was determined to undermine the teachings of Jesus. He caused the believers to go through a tough and challenging time of harassment, torture, putting them into prison, and even death. Because of his behavior, Paul didn't have a good reputation

among the believers. He became dangerous, a danger to the Christian Movement. As a Pharisee, he was very strict in upholding the Jewish Laws and condemned anyone who wouldn't obey them.

One day, while he was on his way to Damascus to persecute more people, Paul had an unusual experience. He met Jesus and saw Him face to face. Let's listen to what happened to him going to Damascus: "Meanwhile Saul, also named Paul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if Paul found any who belonged to the Way (of Jesus), men or women, that Paul would bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now, as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly, a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."⁷ The men traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing;⁸ so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. Paul was without sight for three days, and neither ate nor drank."

From this passage of Scripture, we see that Paul had a strong determination, and no one could stop him but Jesus Christ. Paul lost his sight for three days and received his eyesight when he met the priest Ananias who laid his hand over his eyes. Because Paul had done so much harm, Ananias was afraid of him, then the Lord said, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I

have chosen to bring my name before gentiles and kings and before my people.” Ananias did as the Lord commanded. This story of Paul seeing the priest, Ananias, is an excellent example of receiving grace. Paul, himself once said that God’s grace is sufficient. God’s grace is enough for everyone. I am very thankful that God’s grace is for all. Each of us needs His mercy. When I say “grace,” I am referring to God’s love poured out to us. He loves us despite our shortcomings, downfalls, and doubting and disbelief. He knows we aren’t perfect and can quickly go astray, but His grace is sufficient for us.

When Paul became a changed man, he admitted his faults and became fully committed to the Lord. Let’s hear the words of Apostle Paul: “I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he considered me faithful and appointed me to his service, ¹³ even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me^[a] with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ The saying is sure and worthy, he said, of full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶ But for that very reason, I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience as an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. ¹⁷ To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible,^[b] the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.”

Paul’s experience on the way to Damascus was an act of Jesus turning his doubting into faith and believing, an act of grace. The Lord knew Paul was strong, would be committed, and

had a good heart, but with the wrong intention, a false belief. And when Jesus opened Paul's eyes, Paul was no longer the same. His heart turned to Jesus from a condemner to a believer who admitted his disbelief. Because of his experience with Jesus, he received grace and became a witness of the Lord, no longer a doubter but a believer. It was God's grace through Jesus Christ; Paul became a new person. He found joy in Jesus, overflowing grace. This same grace is for everyone who believes and accepts Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

In other words, God's grace is a gift given to all who believe, obey, and serve Him. Our founder, John Calvin, a firm believer in grace, said, "by a secret and special operation of the Holy Spirit, God's grace is poured forth upon the elect. Since the extension of this grace is an act of divine power, it cannot be resisted any more than the original creation could have resisted the creative might of the Lord." He believed grace is an act of God given through His Son, Jesus Christ. This act of grace is something we can't obtain or receive on our own. We need a mediator, a redeemer who has not sinned and did no wrong to save us. We have someone who kept us from straying from God, who picks us up so we can start again with a forgiven relationship with the Lord. God sent us Jesus, and because of Him, we can live again, can have hope and peace. We still have a chance to redeem ourselves again; thanks be to God.

In closing, Paul talked about his failures and doubting and harming God's people. He admitted his faults and eventually found forgiveness. Paul was not a good person, didn't do good deeds to the followers of Jesus, and still found mercy. And despite his attitude and behavior, he became a changed man. Jesus didn't have to receive Paul, didn't have to change his heart at all, but He did. Jesus knew Paul's heart. He knew his inner being. And guess

what? Jesus knows us; He knows our failures. He knows our shortcomings. Jesus knows when we are weak and about to fall and knows when we fall. And, in our falling, He reaches out to us, even calls us by name, and receives us as His own. Jesus knows everything about us because we are His children, children of the heavenly king. He wants us to stay in relations with Him. So, I say to you, as I say to myself, let's stay in God's grace, His overflowing grace, flowing into hearts, minds, and souls. Amen.