

## **SERMON: “like me: redeemed by grace.”**

Rev. Geoff Ross: Sunday, March 11, 2018, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

[Recap: A&E/Sin/Fall- Beginning Grace. Abram: chosen by grace – a gift given beyond our deserving. Nicodemus – wretch like you/me overcome gap: person we are/meant to be – reborn/again by grace. Levi/Matthew/Saul/Paul: accepted – as they/who they were –by grace. Without grace/lost/no chance to be chosen/reborn/accepted/saved: Grace: “*last best word*”/PY – God’s love/saving plan for us; which is good because we are often not good at accepting/giving grace.]

Last week we heard about the story of the call to Levi/Matthew as being scandalous: it was then, is now, and always will be. Grace – the true all forgiving, all transforming, grace that only God can give – is shocking when it happens to us, outrageous when it happens to others, and that’s because it upsets our concept of justice in our minds/see the world. But that’s the point: it’s not about us – or about anything we can control. God knew that we were unable to save ourselves – and, sadly, that we were/are an unforgiving/vengeful lot, slow to forget/quick to judge – and that the only way we would be restored was if someone else would do it for us: that the only way for us to be saved was for us to be redeemed by grace.

But even this is hard for us to comprehend/accept – we kick/sputter about what we’ve done/haven’t done; we pout and try to explain away/justify our condition: but it’s true. [“*If we say that we have no sin/deceive ourselves/truth is not in us:*” (1 John 1:8)] We are all guilty/fallen in God’s eyes and unworthy of salvation. And, left on our own, we have no chance of salvation. After all, God is a God of justice and can’t look the other way and give us mercy without justice – that would contradict God’s nature because justice must be served/satisfied. While the letter of the law can be unforgiving, we can thank God because God chose another remedy – but there’s a catch: our redemption came at a cost.

[Monopoly: “*get out of jail free*” card/nothing free – that’s why grace so amazing!]

The reason we are doing a series on grace during Lent is because, frankly, it is often the only time of the year we focus on the meaning of the cross – and the extent of what Jesus did for us. As Christians we believe that Jesus came to be-with us to save/redeem us: He was born/(Incarnation) as one of us to die for us. In doing this He took on/bore all of our sins and paid the penalty – the cost of our sins – by dying on our behalf. By doing this justice was served once and for all: only the life of the Son of God would be worthy enough to pay the price of our falling from grace. This is why grace is so amazing – He did what He did for us despite knowing who we are/what we’re capable of: grace exists because of who God is/what Jesus did for us.

And that’s what God does because love is more powerful than justice, but also because love includes justice, and because mercy at the expense of justice would compromise love. This is why Jesus told Nicodemus that “*God so loved the world that he gave his*

*only Son, so ...that the world might be saved through him;*” (John 3:16-17) and why Paul wrote, that *“God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.”* (Romans 5:8) God showed both His love for us and His need for justice: Love for love’s sake dying for us. And this is why Jesus could forgive the woman in our readings: He knew He was going to die for her.

[Sin/Pain/Guilt/Shame:#MeToo/abuse/violence=brokenworld/covnt/rels:all fallen.]

Like the woman accused of breaking the marriage covenant, you/I/we have, in ways too numerous/scandalous to mention, dishonoured/broken our covenant/relationship with one another/God – to love God. (Deut 5:6/Matt 22:36-40) Yet because God is first and foremost a God of love – a love manifested in Jesus Christ who, when presented with a terrorized, half-naked woman and challenged by an angry mob of self-righteous Pharisees/teachers of the Law/Elders/men holding stones demanding that He pass judgment on her, chooses instead to forgive/restore/redeem her. Not answering – knowing that He was on trial with the woman – Jesus just sits, writing in the dirt. Finally Jesus stood up and said; *“If any of you have never sinned, go ahead, you throw the first stone at her!”*

[Jesus: meets/loves/accepts us/as we are – doesn’t leave us as we were.]

Sinners gravitated to Jesus wherever He went. They knew He offered them something that nobody else in the world would give: grace. While the world demanded justice, Jesus gave them forgiveness/love/redemption: He gave them – people like Nicodemus the curious Pharisee/Levi and his tax-collector friends/the woman/like you/me – the gift of freedom from our sins/past/shame/guilt, hope to live a new, better life; redemption. One by one, silently, they dropped their stones/walked away – leaving her with Jesus. Jesus could’ve walked away/agreed with them/picked up a stone but He didn’t: He stayed and saved a stranger/sinner like her/you/me so we could live lives changed/redeemed by grace. Amen.