

SERMON: “like me: restored by grace.”

Rev. Geoff Ross: Sunday, March 18, 2018, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

When I was mapping out this series I knew that I had to talk about the parable of the Prodigal Son – that we could not have a series on grace without the parable that provided the metaphor that became the core of the hymn “*Amazing Grace*” – a message we need to hear again and again; that grace is a gift given unilaterally to us by a loving God. But, as some have said to me each of the stories of God’s grace we’ve looked at seem too good to be true. Unfortunately this is exactly why we have such a hard time accepting His/the promises of God’s grace: after all we don’t deserve it after all of the things we’ve done! [Mirror/remember everything.]

Aware of our resistance/mistrust of grace, this is why Jesus talked about it often – and in many different ways. Interestingly while Jesus talked about grace, He never used the word: He – as Philip Yancey says – spoke of “*a world suffused with God’s grace: the sun shines on the good and bad; birds gather seeds gratis; wildflowers bloom on rocky hillsides: Jesus saw grace everywhere/thing.*” (WAAG? p. 329) Jesus communicated grace through His actions. He met Nicodemus in the midst of his doubt and invited him to be reborn by grace, by grace He accepted/invited Levi to follow Him, Last week in how He redeemed the woman caught in adultery; He never used the word but it was the subject of every story/parable He used to describe God’s nature/love – how someone like the younger son – a person like you/me – could be restored by grace.

The parable of the Prodigal Son is the third of three parables told together (99/1 lost sheep/shepherd looks everywhere to find it/rejoices; lost coin/woman who does the same). This familiar parable (too much so) has three characters (younger/older son/father), but, while named for the prodigal son, the parable is about the father/his love for the son he thought he had lost but now has found – was dead but has returned home alive – it’s about a father’s/God’s love/His response to our being found/restored. As a set these parables make the same point: each tells of the loser’s sense of loss, of their joy in finding what was once lost, and ends with a celebration. What Jesus is telling those listening is that God rejoices when the lost is found – when one of His children who, like you/like me, got lost/went astray is found and returns/repents.

[BJs World Series/Parade: add Raptors/Argos?TFC – then Leafs: Celebration/Heaven Bigger!]

In His response to the Pharisees offended by His acceptance of Levi/friends, Jesus tells us that He didn’t “*come to call not the righteous but sinners*” (Mat 9:13) – that He came not for the one’s who thought they were ok but for those who knew they weren’t – those who pray, “*God, have mercy – Jesus, remember me; help!*” To those listening to Jesus this meant two things: to the lost this was good news because grace doesn’t depend on what we’ve done/who we are for/to God but on what God did for us; for the righteous it is scandalous. And this is probably the harder/confounding truth of this parable: the fact that what blocks grace isn’t God’s refusal to give it – it’s our refusal to accept it. Need

proof? As we heard, even while the son “*was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry/had compassion for him. He ran to his son and hugged and kissed him.*” (Luke 15:20): God’s arms are always open in welcome/extended in acceptance/reaching toward us; we’re the ones who hold back/turn away – we’re the ones who withhold our affection.

[Restored=Made whole/return to original condition/place/position: haemorrhaging woman. Grace is offensive because it’s for those who need it – lost people like her/him/you/me.]

The interesting thing about the father is that rather than refusing/barring/scolding his son, he’s willing to publically humiliate himself – something not lost on His listeners/Pharisees! Adding insult to injury Jesus tells of the father’s joy/rejoicing – and of the command that a fatted calf be slaughtered for a celebration – and that the finest clothes be brought for the returned son to wear thereby making him clean/acceptable/returning him to his place/position to attend the banquet! The father’s actions restored him through grace.

The message of the parable is that God is a God who welcomes home anyone who will have Him – in fact; He initiates it/took the first move toward us – in Jesus. Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish theologian describes it this way; “*When it is a question of a sinner... He goes infinitely farther than any shepherd or any woman, He went the infinitely long way from being God to becoming man, and that way He went in search of sinners.*” (**WAAG?** p. 339) This is why grace wrecks me! Jesus’ life and mission was to leave the safety of heaven to find the lost – it was He who came because God is “the One who loves,” loves us like the waiting/heartsick/worried father who only wants the best for us – people like you/like me – so He can restore us by His grace. Amen.