

SERMON: “like me: amazing grace.”

Rev. Geoff Ross: Easter Sunday, April 1, 2018,
St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Easter Sunday is about the Gospel/Good News of God's grace – a grace that saved us/people like you/me from death – offering hope to us for eternity and the joy of being chosen/accepted/redeemed/restored/received – loved. Karl Barth, the great 20th Century theologian commented that *'Jesus' gift of forgiveness'* – of grace – was to him *'more astonishing than Jesus' miracles.'* *'Miracles,'* he said, *'broke the physical laws of the universe, whereas grace broke its moral laws – it turns the world, and the ways we believe the world operates upside-down.'* And it's true; God's grace challenges us and our understanding of what is right/fair/just. There are few topics in the Gospels that are as offensive as grace [ok for us/ice-cream; not for others], then there's the problem that many of us don't think we either need it or deserve it. But maybe we look at/think about grace the wrong way: after all, grace isn't about us!

Growing up we were told to *“be good”* and, now as adults, we believe that our worth/identity/status/as a person/Christian – is something measured/earned by our having *“done the right thing.”* Sadly – in one way or another – none of us managed to be *“good enough:”* we slipped/strayed off course/failed to live up to our modest ideals – and we've lived with the consequences. We look in the mirror and we see – like Dorian Gray – every blotch/nick/scar of our sins/faults/failings of our unvarnished selves. But that's not how God sees us! Friends, regardless of how hoary we may see ourselves as being, God loves us. And this is what's amazing about grace: that God would love wretches like you/like me unconditionally!

[Who doesn't want to be loved like that? – grace lets us be the person want/meant to be.]

This is why the Bible/faith is made up of stories about how God's promise to offer His grace was fulfilled in/through people no different that we are. Stories about how God chose to enter into a covenant with Abram to begin the process of fulfilling His promise to restore His broken creation; stories of how Jesus attracted sinners – the lost/fallen/shunned/shamed – wherever He went, and how by acknowledging them where they were, He offered something that they had lost: a sense of hope. Jesus came to offer hope by offering God's grace to a sin-sick/lost/frantic/overwhelmed/restless world filled with people like you/me. Why? Because, while every sinner has a past, there is a deeper truth: every sinner/one of us – is a child of God, loved by a God who waits to welcome us home with joy and celebration.

This is why the story of the lost-then-found/prodigious son gave us a glimpse of a father who celebrates, first and foremost, restored relationships – after all, God's grace isn't about rehabilitation; it's about restoration. This is why as we heard in our John reading, God came to us – first/unilaterally – in the form of His Son. This is why Jesus came to be-with us/welcomed sinners/ate with the lost where they were first. God loves us so

much that He sent His Son as a sign of His grace – [He was “*full of grace and truth*”] – so that we might know/experience what grace in our graceless world. And, like the loving, God’s focus is on you – you/you/you/you/me – because once you were lost and have been found, were dead and now you’re alive, blind but now can see: God rejoices because you said yes to His offer of grace – God’s amazing grace that changed everything/world and has been changing lives ever since on soul at a time.

[ES/resurrection: Jesus revealed to us/full extent of God’s power/depth of God’s love – a father’s love for His children/you/me.]

Friends, Easter Sunday is all about grace – God’s amazing grace. It is a celebration of a God who – through grace – loves us enough to offer us new life by redeeming/restoring us despite ourselves, not because of who we are, but because of who He is. Out of His love God heard our cries and came as Emmanuel/God-with-us in Jesus/Christmas/Incarnation to live as one of us to take our place/die for us/taking on our sins. Good Friday – Jesus’ death/crucifixion – had to happen/had to die so that, by grace, no person would be beyond redemption/stain beyond cleaning/nothing will disqualify us from God’s love. Yes grace is irrational/unfair/unjust, and only makes sense because it isn’t about us – it’s about God. Easter Sunday is the fulfillment of the promise that God would offer His grace to the world: that through faith we will be forgiven/saved/set free, just as Jesus was freed from the grave on Easter morning. Amen

[8:00am Communion/ending.]

So, as we turn toward the Table and the Easter feast prepared for us through God’s grace, come to be set free from what you fear the most – from whatever burdens you’ve been carrying, from past shames and regrets: Jesus died to rise from the dead to offer us hope/wiping our sins away. Come. This table is the table of grace. This is the celebration of the death-defying, grave defeating, hope inspiring, life giving, joyous power of God’s amazing grace – a grace given to people like you/me. Amen.