

Grace Happens: Justifying Grace **May 10, 2020**

Overarching theme: In 2020, FUMC will be a **Go** church!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

Letter to the Romans:

Paul's letter to the Romans was written anywhere from 53 to 58 A.D. Most likely this letter went to believers in Rome, which were mainly house churches. The group of recipients had not formed into a church as of this time. Wesley's notes refer to Priscilla and Aquila being in Rome and hosting disciples at their home. "They were tentmakers as was Paul. Priscilla and Aquila had been among the Jews expelled from Rome by the Roman Emperor Claudius in the year 49 as written by Suetonius. They ended up in Corinth. Paul lived with Priscilla and Aquila for approximately 18 months." Paul wrote Romans from the city of Corinth as he wintered there on his third missionary journey as described in Acts 20:2-3. This is based on Romans 16:1 and 16:23, in regards to a reference to Pheobe in Cenchreae, an eastern port of Corinth. When Paul wrote the Book of Romans, he had been a preacher for some 20 years. He was on his third missionary tour and was looking at going to Rome. He wrote this letter in preparation for going to Rome.

Reflect on this Scripture:

Romans 5:1-2 (NRSV) Scripture for Sermon

¹ Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

Romans 6:3-14 (NRSV)

³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For whoever has died is freed from sin. ⁸ But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. ¹³ No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Questions to ponder about the passages:

What jumps out at you from these passages?

So, bottom line, what do you get out of these passages?

What does "Justified by grace" mean?

What did Christ Jesus do for us according to Romans 5:1-2?

What does it mean to die as Christ?

What does it mean to be united with Christ in the resurrection?

If we die to ourselves, what will be destroyed in us?

Having been raised with Christ, what does that give you power over?

Who do you live for?

Commentary:

For another week, we continue on our journey to learn about grace. For United Methodists and John Wesley, "Grace" and its forms are the hallmark of our theology. John Wesley outlined three aspects of grace in his sermon on "The Way of Salvation." The Book of Discipline 2016, Part III Doctrinal Standards, paragraph 102. Section 1, highlights the three aspects of grace in the salvation process. For the next several weeks, we will be focusing on these three aspects of grace: Preventive, Justifying, and Sanctifying.

Last week, we focused on preventive grace. The meaning of preventive in Bing's online dictionary is "preceding in time or order; antecedent." The term preventive comes from a Latin word that meant "to come before, to anticipate."

Consequently, preventive before the word "grace" means, a grace that comes before. You may ask, before what? Well, it is the grace of God, or the work of God,

that acts in every person's life before a person even understands and accepts the reality of God's power working on their behalf.

Both of our scriptures from last week highlighted the idea that God was at work before we even knew it. In the Gospel of John, Jesus was described as one who was part of the Godhead from the beginning as the "Word." Christ did not just come into existence upon his earthly birth, but was from the beginning. God was already working in creation to the culmination of Christ Jesus' death and resurrection for the salvation of the world. The Gospel of John also describes Christ Jesus as a light. Jesus was the light that would enlighten all mankind to God's love, grace, and redemption.

In Ephesians, we find that we all were dead in our transgressions, or sin, before knowing God in Christ. The great thing is that God already started to work on our behalf, even though we were dead in our transgressions, to bring about a way that would lead us to salvation and into a relationship with the creator God. God's work in our lives that leads us to the door of salvation, before we understand it and accept it, is prevenient grace. Our transgressions separated us from God, but by accepting the work of God in Christ, we have forgiveness of our transgressions and a new relationship with God. The work of prevenient grace is stage one.

John Wesley used the image of the house of God to illustrate grace in the process of salvation. Before anyone can enter the house of God through the door to make residence, one must step on the porch, which is the place of God's prevenient grace. It is the place where God is at work before a person understands it. A place in which God is working to lead a person to the door of salvation, or committed relationship. It is the place where the light of Christ shines as a way to light the path to salvation. The light shines into the darkness of life as a beacon of God's love and grace.

This week, we focus on Justifying Grace.

Continuing with our house of God illustration, God's grace works on people standing on the porch before they even know it, while having been attracted by the porch light of Christ shining in the darkness of mankind's self-centeredness, or sin. It is on the porch, while facing the door, that God's convicting grace works on the heart of the individual to want to change their self-centeredness, or sinful ways. It is at the door that the convicted person realizes the distance between God and him/herself cannot be crossed by personal performance, or adherence to a particular law. The person's relationship to God can only be made right, or repaired by accepting the gift of God's grace through Christ's death, and resurrection. What does that mean? Well, like Christ, we all must die to, or put away, the self-centeredness, or sin, that has led us away from God. In the act of Christ's death on the cross, he took all sin upon himself, so that sin would not

reign over us any longer. In the power of the resurrection of Christ, a person is raised up into the newness of life with God in right relationship. Through the act of repentance, sin is forgiven, and relationship is restored as the person lives in the faith founded in what Christ did and will do. When one accepts what Christ has done and lives into it, that is the act of turning the knob on the door to walk into the house of God. The opening of the door to enter the house of God symbolizes **God's Justifying Grace**, or Pardoning Grace.

As you heard Pastor Tom say in the sermon:

“Convicting Grace opens our eyes to our selfishness and we then repent.”

“That change of heart (repentance) can lead us to the door of grace in the house of salvation... Wesley called this Justifying Grace (or Pardoning Grace). In which we access the door through the faithfulness and forgiveness of Christ and stand inside the peace-filled house by his grace.”

Next week, we will continue with God's Sanctifying Grace.

Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:

In these passages, what is the main practical lesson you get from it?

How can we describe God's grace in these scriptures?

What does it feel like to be trapped in sin, or distant from God?

What does forgiveness feel like?

How did you personally come to know God's grace?

How did you repent of your sin and self-centeredness?

How would you describe justifying grace?

What does it mean to you to be dead to sin and raised in newness of life?

Activity of for the life of a disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week:
Romans 6:13 (NRSV) “No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness.”
3. Think on how you can present yourself as instruments of righteousness before God and in the world this week.