

Grace Happens: Preventive Grace **May 3, 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.

Gospel of John:

The Gospel of John was the last narrative written out of the four Gospels, sometime after 70 A.D. and before 90 A.D. The Gospel narratives were probably written to help people remember the story from actual witnesses. Most likely, decades after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the stories about Jesus had morphed into half-truths. Each Gospel had many similar stories but with a unique perspective from the eye witness. The Gospel of John emphasized Jesus as the Christ and Son of God. The people that received this writing were Christians who were struggling with the influence of the Jews who did not see Jesus as the Christ. So, the writer was encouraging them to see Jesus as the divine one who came from God the Father. The first chapter highlights the idea that Jesus was preexistent (verses 1:1-14). Through the whole Gospel of John, Jesus is referred to as the divine one.

Letter to the Ephesians:

The letter to the Ephesians was written by Paul to the church and surrounding people of Ephesus sometime around 60 A.D. Paul wrote this letter from jail, and probably wrote the letter to the Colossians about this same time. Paul's ministry at Ephesus totaled about 3 years, so he was very knowledgeable about their needs and issues. Ephesus was the most important city in western Asia Minor having a harbor that opened into the Cayster River. That river emptied into the Aegean Sea making accessible by ship very easy. Consequently, the city was an intersection of major trade routes, and a strong commercial center. It boasted a pagan temple dedicated to the Roman goddess Diana, or Artemis in Greek, which served the fertility religion of its time. Paul wrote to expand the horizons of his readers, so that they might understand better the dimensions of God's eternal purpose and

grace in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2) and come to appreciate the high goals God has for the church

Reflect on this Scripture:

John 1:1-9 (NRSV) Sermon Scripture

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

Ephesians 2 (NRSV)

¹ You were dead through the trespasses and sins ² in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³ All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. ⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— ⁹ not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

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 is the message concerning Jesus?

How is Jesus the light of all people? What does it mean?

Who was John in this story?

What was mankind like before coming alive in Christ?

In Ephesians, what is God do for mankind through loving grace?

What is loving grace?

What redeems, or saves, you? What does redeem and save mean?

You were created to do...? What does that look like?

Commentary:

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 three weeks, we will be focusing on these three aspects of grace: Preventive, Justifying, and Sanctifying. This week, we focus 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 highlight 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 preventive 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 preventive 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 preventive 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.

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?

How has Christ been a light in your life?

How would you describe prevenient grace?

How does Ephesians describe the before and after picture of you?

Have you accepted and lived into what God has given you?

What were you created for?

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:
Ephesian 2:8-9 (NRSV)
“⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— ⁹ not the result of works, so that no one may boast.”
3. Think on how God worked with you before you committed to follow Christ. Define prevenient grace in your own words and support it with your own illustration.