



March 1-7, 2020

Sunday, March 1

Scripture: Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

Devotional:

There was a time when I worked myself almost to insanity. In addition to my job, I said *yes* to everything I was asked to do. I was on multiple community boards. I was volunteering for activities at my kids' school, at church, and community venues. I would come home depleted and unfulfilled. I gave of myself until there was little left to give.

At some point, I came to realize that most of what I was doing was ineffective. I was not doing a great job in any of my roles. My children needed more time with their mommy. My body and mind were constantly tired. My work was not up to the standard it should have been or usually is. Most of all, I was resentful at God for never being enough.

In a moment of desperation, I cried out. I asked for relief from the burdens. My answer came in quiet opportunities of reprieve. Meetings were cancelled for various reasons. Family provided meals unplanned. Children had sick days which allowed us time to simply cuddle. In those quiet moments, I was reminded that I had chosen all of the busyness. I had built myself into the box that was chained to a calendar and watch.

God reminded me that I was not forced into any of this. His grace is enough to save me; I had to have enough grace for myself to take care of myself and my family. Time for committees and volunteering are still on my calendar. However, my calendar does not define who I am. I often find myself saying, *I will have to get back with you. I don't have my calendar with me right now.* That is so freeing and empowering.

Today, I try to have faith that God will guide me into decisions I should make. I have learned to say no when timing is not right for me – or for my family. I pray about things instead of saying yes out of habit. I also ask myself why I am saying yes. Is it to look good to others? Is it because I am afraid to say no? Or, is it because I really want to do that particular thing?

Finding God's grace for me led to finding grace for myself. Finding grace for myself has allowed me to have more grace for others. St. Francis of Assisi once said, *Above all the grace and the gifts that Christ gives to His beloved is that of overcoming self.* I pray daily to overcome myself in order that I might be a gift to others of His beloved.

Grace is a powerful thing, through it we are saved. However, it is through faith that His grace is received. We must allow God to surround us with His presence and have faith that He will direct us on the paths for which we are intended. For me, that means getting out of my own way and allowing time to be quiet.

Prayer:

God, make me a vessel for your works, not my own. Help me remember that You are in control; your grace is sufficient to guide me. Give me pause to reflect upon Your will for me through all situations, and grant me peaceful moments in which to reflect on Your purpose for my day. Amen.

Submitted by: Melissa Eudy

Monday, March 2

Scripture: Philippians 1:3-11

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Devotional:

Grace comes to us in mundane things, said Elizabeth on Sunday, February 23, 2020 during her sermon. Well GRACE hit me straight in the face in that same evening as I sat to write this devotion. For two weeks I had read this passage over and over from The Living Bible and the New International Version. I read the passage one phrase at a time: in its entirety and a verse at a time. During this preparation time the common theme that continued to surface was that of Prayer and Praise to God.

Paul always opens each of his writings with thanksgiving, praise and love to each person who will read it. Although he was imprisoned at the time (AD 60 or 61) when Philippians was written, he was full of love for his dear friends.

In the 8th verse, Paul acknowledges that only *God knows how deep is my love for you*. We are encouraged to always love others while growing deeper in our spiritual knowledge.

I try to spend some time each day in prayer....at home, in the car, visiting at nursing homes or even at the YMCA. I learned many years ago (while attending a Montreat Music and Worship Conference) to begin each prayer with thanksgiving. After a time of praise, I give God the issues that are the forefront of my concern and then ask for His forgiveness/ continued *grace* and guidance.

I am humbled as a Mimi when Palmer (my grandson) is with us. Whether at the table or at bedtime, he always says his prayers. Sometimes the prayers are those he has learned at preschool (at Wake Forest Presbyterian Church) and at other times, he asks either Morgan, Dan or I to *start* the prayer. My heart is full to know that even at the age of five, he is aware of always giving thanks.

A week or so ago Dan was watching me go over and over the scripture and he offered to bring me another version. He never mentioned it again until I sat down at the computer to begin typing. GRACE came quickly.... the version was The Book. As I was looking up the Philippians passage, a card fell out of the bible. Granted it was the only card *in* the bible. The front of the card was the 4th verse, *When I pray for you, my heart is full of joy*. Inside the card read, *You mean so much to me, and I'm asking GOD to bless you and fulfill His promises for you in very special ways. Love Joe and TuTu*. Joe was Dan's stepfather and TuTu was Dan's mom. Dan said this card was most likely placed in this Bible about twenty years ago.

Lesson gleaned as I prepared my heart for this writing...never stop praying for others; never stop thanking God for all His goodness and gifts; never stop being His hands, His feet, His eyes and never stop praying. We never know the depth, the width or the longevity of our prayers for others.

Footnote: I met Dan in December 2004...I met his mom in September 2005. I am assured from the time I first met her until she took her last breath on earth in January 2014, she called out my name and my children's names in prayer every day. For that I will forever be grateful and thus continue to follow in Paul's suggestion to always *overflow with love for others*.

Second footnote: Dan's mom's name was Grace Juanita.

Prayer:

God is good. God is great. Amen

Submitted by: Martha Sue Hall

Tuesday, March 3

Scripture: Matthew 20:1-16

‘For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ So the last will be first, and the first will be last.

Devotional:

Do you remember the last time you signed a contract? Perhaps it was to lease or buy a car. Perhaps it was to rent an apartment, purchase appliances, or finance an education. Or, maybe you were hiring someone to do some work.

A contract is between at least two parties and involves offer and acceptance. One party says I will do this for that price and the other party either accepts or rejects the offer. If they accept the offer, there is a deal (or a contract) which may be either oral or in writing. If they reject the offer, then the parties may continue to negotiate until they both agree on the terms and then you have a deal.

Sadly, many contracts run into problems as the parties have disputes over time. That can occur because there is no timeframe for completion, other important elements are left out of the contract, or the parties rely solely on oral statements versus written contracts. Or, there may be fine print in a contract that one party never read and does not think is fair. You may well have thought of other reasons for contract disputes. Unfortunately, they happen a lot. Ah, the lessons we have all learned! Sometimes they have been painful and costly.

The scripture today is a parable that most all of us have heard before. It is about the Vineyard workers. Those who were hired and went out first were deeply troubled that they worked much longer hours for the same pay that other workers got who came later in the day. It didn’t seem fair.

But this parable isn’t about fairness. It isn’t about vineyards. And, it isn’t about workers. It is about our ability to have eternal life in God’s kingdom. Jesus is telling us that entrance into heaven is by God’s grace alone. **It does not matter when in life you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.**

You see, God has a very simple contract that is available to each one of us and there is no timeframe for completion in this contract. That is intentional! We should not begrudge those who turn to God in the last moments of life because, in reality, no one deserves eternal life. We should never be jealous of what God has given to another person. Instead, we must focus on God’s generous offering to each one of us.

I, for one, will graciously accept his offer. We have a deal! Thank you Lord!

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, we know that today is Super Tuesday. But tomorrow will be Super Wednesday and the next day Super Thursday. Next is Super Friday and on and on. Why? Because it is by your grace that those who believe in Christ can not only have their sins forgiven, but also have the opportunity for eternal life. Knowing that makes every day a Super day! We graciously accept your offer. Thank you Lord! Amen.

Submitted by: Rich Schaefer

Wednesday, March 4

Scripture: Luke 15:11-32

Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’” So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

“Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

Devotional:

This parable is a very familiar one. A young man yearns for the excitement of the city lights. Perhaps he’s tired of being told what to do. He demands his inheritance now and sets off to live life on his terms. He falls in with a fast crowd. He sees himself as a player. He takes up a hedonistic lifestyle. After awhile his funds run out and, to make matters worse, there is an economic downturn. There is no organized social safety net in ancient Israel. Just to survive, he is forced to take just about the most demeaning job a Jew could have; tending swine.

Fortunately, he comes to his senses and sees what he has become. He longs for home and makes a decision to return there with his tail between his legs. His father, seeing him approach from afar, runs to meet and embrace him. The son is honestly contrite. The father is not concerned about the failings of the past, choosing only to celebrate the prodigal’s return.

Being something of a literalist, I’ve had a bit of difficulty identifying with the wayward son. I am more conformist than rebel. I have not sought a raucous lifestyle. I doubt that I ever seriously considered running away from home. Being a responsible person is generally the goal. But as I contemplated this passage, I thought of times when I have gone my own way with God. Many times, the only consequence has been a sense of regret for not doing the best that I could have done. Sometimes, circumstances have sent me running back to God expressing shame, begging for forgiveness and, asking God to help in some way to make things right. Regardless of the situation, I have had the assurance that God will embrace me and welcome me back, no questions asked.

Prayer:

Creator God, forgive our failure to follow the path that you have lovingly set before us. We are grateful that you still welcome our contrite hearts back into the fold. May your Word inspire us to walk with you in the light.

Submitted by: Peggy Finley

Thursday, March 5

Scripture: John 1:1-5, 14-18

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying “This was he whom I said, “He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me. 16 From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. 17 For the law was given through Moses grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.

Devotional:

Today’s scripture, at least to me, brings the most powerful message in the Bible. In many ways, it is the Genesis of the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the Prophets bring the message of the omnipotent Lord whereas the scripture of John establishes God as the Word. Theologians have given various interpretations of this phrase. To many this is a statement that is all powerful in that God establishes that all things came through him whereas he produced the basis of creation and the divinity of his son, Jesus, God incarnate. God brought light into the world that dispelled evil and Satan. And as we prepare for the greatest gift of all time, Jesus on the cross, Savior for our sins, the divinity of Jesus is defined, and reconfirmed by Thomas following the resurrection. Only a Divine Savior could save us from our sins. As a collector of early lighting devices, I cannot help but think of our pioneer ancestors fighting the darkness with feeble lighting devices and the powerful metaphor of God bringing true light that shines on everyone and everything, dispelling the night. The 18th verse of John 1, actually reestablishes the Trinity (Godhead) and confirms that the Word became Flesh. The book of John contains the most recognized and profound verse that is perhaps the best known in the Bible, John 3:16. During these 40 days, that remind us of the sacrifice and withdrawal of Jesus into the desert, let us embrace this season of reflection and preparation for the joyous celebration of Jesus’ resurrection following his ultimate sacrifice for all of us.

Prayer:

Our Heavenly Father, creator of all that is and ever was, we provide thankfulness for the gift of your son, God incarnate, to walk with us on earth as a teacher and Savior, making the ultimate sacrifice on the cross to save us from our sins. As we prepare for the celebration of resurrection, we pray that darkness will be overcome by your powerful and celestial light. We pray that Easter will not be a one day celebratory event but reside in our hearts and minds throughout the days. This we ask in Jesus’ name, Amen

Submitted by: Dr. Robert Gaither

Friday, March 6

Scripture: Luke 14:15-24

One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, *Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!* Then Jesus said to him, *Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner, he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come for everything is ready now.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.' Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.' Another said, 'I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.' So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.' And the slave said, 'Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.' Then the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.'*

Devotional:

GRACE – such a powerful word! Yet, we walk through life and the word *grace* seldom crosses our lips. Only on occasion do we think about grace and acknowledge *that by grace we have been saved through faith*.

Just as those invited to the feast, we rush through life wrapped up in day to day tasks and thoughts of tomorrow's responsibilities. Sometimes it takes a change from life's routine to make us aware of how the grace of God has blessed our lives.

We recently visited friends who were spending the winter with their daughter. The daughter, who had moved to a warmer climate due to her health, lives in a penthouse suite towering over the beach. It definitely was a departure from our routine lifestyle and out of our comfort zone.

As we entered the lobby, we were greeted by a hostess. She was a tall, emaciated black woman who was dressed unpretentiously, but had a huge smile. She made sure we were taken care of and then apologized for leaving. This was her night to work at the homeless shelter. She turned and walked toward the shelter just a few blocks away. When she returned, she smiled as she told us of a person who had asked her if she were homeless. She was neither insulted nor bitter about this inquiry. She went on to tell us of her work at the shelter and of a nearby shelter for women and children. She talked about how her church was involved in the community by aiding the less fortunate. On Sunday, we attended her church in the downtown area. It was an older church set among more prestigious and elegant churches. As we entered, we were warmly greeted and as we looked around we saw a diverse congregation. They were black, white, rich, and poor. I knew immediately why she had chosen to share in the life of this congregation.

We spent much of our time talking about family, catching up on our lives and rehashing memories. Even when she excused herself to rest, she always had a huge smile on her face. She was such a gracious person and hostess. I don't know when I have used the word *gracious* so often in such a short period of time. Her life has truly been touched by God's grace. Through her, we, and many others, have been reminded of God's gift of grace in our lives.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to love and show the spirit of love under all circumstances to all people. May our lives be a glory to You and a help to others. In grace and peace. Amen.

Submitted by: Joyce Lambert

Saturday, March 7

Scripture: Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came and said to him, Lord, *If another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?* Jesus said to him, *Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.*

For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Devotional:

This is a familiar passage to most of us. In the early days of Sunday School, we learn about forgiving in excess. I remember the chorus of a song I learned in a church program in my childhood: *70 times 7, 7 times is not enough to be like God in heaven.* As I began learning my multiplication tables and moving to the school age where you don't get along with everyone, I proudly declared to my parents *once I forgive Jessica 490 times, I don't have to forgive her anymore.* You can imagine they had a lot to teach me in that moment.

My first thought as I read this passage is that of radical grace. The grace we see in this parable is almost too much to comprehend. Forgiving several million dollars? Most of us would rejoice in a mortgage of just a few hundred thousand dollars being forgiven, and even that is hard to imagine being forgiven. We are called to practice this same grace. Don't fret, you don't have to pay the hospital bills of your neighbors to show grace. For me, grace is closely tied to patience and forgiveness. The waitress gets your order wrong when you are in a hurry? Use your calmest voice to thank her for what she brought and kindly ask for the corrected order. Maybe she didn't care and didn't write down your requests, maybe it was actually the kitchen that messed up, or perhaps her grandmother is dying and she just can't hold her focus. The lady checking in at the YMCA is backing up the line? A driver cuts you off? A teacher unfairly gives your child a poor grade? We just never know what others are going through.

Practicing radical grace everyday has the power to change you. My little bout with cancer brought the importance of sharing radical grace in every interaction to light for me. Continuously practicing grace has brought a new calm into my life. Focus tomorrow on sharing radical grace. It is something we must practice again and again. I hope you'll consider sharing that deep grace with others throughout the Lenten season...and after we celebrate Easter.

Prayer:

Oh Lord, thank you for your radical grace in sending your son to die for our sins. Help us, too, to share radical grace with those around us, especially with those who we may believe deserve it the least. As we move through this Lenten season, help us to continue to be mindful of the many blessings we have because of your radical love. In your radical name we pray, amen.

Submitted by: Rebekah Ayscue