

Trinity 9 (2024)

We live in an age where grace is rare and meanness is rife.

I'm sure you have read or heard of incidences where a public figure was 'cancelled' for something he or she said or did or a picture taken 20, 30, or more years ago. The media, in particular, is merciless at such revelations.

Followers of Jesus are called to be counter cultural, even radical, in this regard: **We believe in the forgiveness of sins. We extend grace.**

With Jude (author of the next to the last book in the Bible) we seek "to save [those who have erred] . . . pulling them out of the fire."

Or, to use more up-to-date language we believe in and practice *recycling*.

And, of course, we have a clear biblical mandate for doing so. Paul's words in 1 Timothy 1:15 come to mind:

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”

Jesus is our great exemplar.

But we do not have to wait until the New Testament and Jesus to find examples of divine grace and mercy. They can be found going all the way back to Adam and Eve.

After the first couple had sinned and their nakedness exposed – they knew they were naked – God clothed them with animal skins.

“Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them,” says Genesis 3:21.

Here God provided what they had attempted to provide for themselves with grape leaves. It was an act of graciousness on God's part. In so doing, God demonstrated that He had not abandoned them.

But, at the same time, this act of grace pointed forward to an even greater 'covering'.

Following the coming of the 'One who would bruise Satan's head', the sons and daughters of Adam would be covered with even better garments, Christ's own righteousness.

So, we see in this Genesis passage an early example of God extending grace to the unworthy and a foreshadowing of the Gospel of Christ.

Fast forward now to the story of David, the great king of Israel. After his adulterous affair with the wife of Uriah the Hittite, David was confronted with his sin. He repented, and God

extended grace . . . though David did go on to suffer some rather severe consequences of his wrongdoing, namely unrest in his own family.

God's grace can likewise be found in today's first lesson from Wisdom.

Wisdom is a book in the Apocrypha. In some printings of the Bible, these books are placed between the Old and New Testaments.

They come from the period between the Old and New Testaments. The Anglican Church (following Jerome, an early Church Father) doesn't accord them the same status as the canonical books but considers them worthy to be read for their history and spiritual insights.

In today's passage, we find these words:
“For thou [God] lovest all things that exist, and hast loathing for none of the things which thou hast made.”

In other words, God does not desire the death of his faltering human creatures but rather their return and restoration.

And finally, we come to this morning's New Testament reading, the story of the woman caught in the very act of adultery.

Here we find Jesus extending grace to a woman whom others, in particular the men who brought her, would have discarded or worst still stoned.

Jesus does not say the woman is not guilty or that her sin does not matter.

Remarkably He does something else. He stoops down. Commentators over the years have found significance in this posture. They have seen in it the sinless Son of God stooping down to where erring man is . . . of Jesus identifying Himself with those He came to save.

If they are right, His posture points forward to what He did at Calvary. There, He stooped very low, taking the sin of the world upon Himself.

The just dying for the unjust is not an easy concept to get our minds round, yet that is what the Bible say happened.

The great thing is that we don't have to understand what in theological language is called the Atonement to receive its benefit.

Why not make it personal? Look at your own life. Think about the times you have not lived up to your own standards let alone God's.

Think about things you have done that have hurt other people, things you have said that were unkind or unjust.

If you found yourself in a court of law and all the facts were laid out, what would be the

verdict? I know what the verdict would be in my case, guilty as charged.

But don't stop there. Look at Jesus stooping down before the guilty woman and her accusers and on to the cross.

Then say: I am that woman. I am the one for whom Jesus died. He took my sin and shame.

Then, hear Him say, **“Neither do I condemn you . . . Go and sin no more.”**

“Grace, greater than all our sin.” That is the theme of today's service, and no better theme can be had. If a preacher had but one sermon, it would have to be about the extravagant grace of God manifested in Jesus Christ.

Make it personal. Let Him liberate you from the past and all its garbage.

A prayer for the end of the day that comes out of New Zealand goes like this:

It is night.
Let us be still in the presence of God.
It is night after a long day.
What has been done has been done;
What has not been done has not been done;
Let it be.
Lord, the night is quiet.
Let the quietness of your peace enfold us,
All dear to us,
And all who have no peace . . .

Grace is what enables such confidence and peace . . . not just at the end of each calendar day but at the end of life's day.

Before I close, allow me to highlight a less comforting aspect of today's scripture. That is the grace-**less**-ness of the men who brought the woman to Jesus.

Clearly, the whole affair was a setup. Their purpose for bringing her was to trip Jesus up and discredit Him. Perhaps one of the men in

the pack was the ‘other party’. After all, adultery is not a solo sport.

In any case, the question they brought before Jesus – Should this woman be stoned in accordance with the law of Moses? -- was one of those questions on the order of “Are you still beating your wife.”

If He had said yes, His answer would have gone against everything He had been teaching and doing . . . receiving those who knew their lives did not measure up and welcoming those considered outcasts by the religious leaders.

More than that, if He had given this answer, He would have gotten Himself in trouble with the Roman civil authorities. The Jews did not have the authority to put anyone to death.

On the other hand, if he had said, “let her go”, He would have been seen as going against

the law of Moses and morality and the good order of society.

The way He handled the situation was nothing short of brilliant. Instead of condemning her, He condemns her accusers. His words “**He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her**” was all it took to expose their hypocrisy.

One by one they disappeared, leaving the only one qualified to judge her, Jesus the sinless.

I said these accusers were grace-less. To them, this woman was a non-person, nothing more than a pawn. They cared nothing for her and were happy to see her dead.

There is no doubt an application here for us. Do we see people, let's say those with problems or guilty of gross sins, as non-entities, nuisances? Or, as souls for whom Christ died,

people with worth and value and a God-given dignity?

A woman with apparent mental problems appeared on the church yard this past week.

I am proud of how the women of St. Luke's responded. They offered her a kind word. They asked how they could help. One person gave her some money.

It is easy to dismiss people, to be like the men told about in this story. They serve as negative examples. Jesus points us to a better and more radical way, the way of grace.

Hymnwriter Julia Johnson has given us these words:

*Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,
Freely bestowed on all who believe!
All who are longing to see His face,
Will you this moment His grace **receive**?*

We might add another question: Will you this moment His grace **extend**?

Grace, you see, is a two-way street. Those who receive it are to share it. Look for opportunities in the coming week for doing just that.

The world rubbishes people. We pull them out of the fire. Dare to be a radical for Jesus' sake.