

Pentecost 4A; Proper 8

July 2, 2017

Ken Wratten at St Luke's

Jeremiah 28:5-9 Abraham almost sacrifices Isaac

Romans 6:12-23 We are not under law but under grace

Matthew 10:40-42 Discipleship, living under Grace, encompasses carrying our cross AND having God's blessing of eternal life

Life of Grace

It was just three years ago that Bishop Mary spoke with Ruth and me at her husband Michael's funeral service at St Andrew's. I remember my surprise when she told us that she had written to the 83 year old driver of the car that hit Michael; she wrote to say that she forgave him.

I recall in 1981 when Pope John Paul was shot by a Turkish terrorist in an assassination attempt. When he got out of the hospital, he visited his assailant in prison, to forgive him. It made world news.

These are staggering examples in my memory, of people demonstrating the working of God's grace.

Grace is the topic that every Christian needs to understand, because Grace uniquely distinguishes the Christian faith from every other religion in the world. Our understanding the works of Grace, and our living the life of Grace can transform our Christian life.

We usually simplify Grace to stand for God's unconditional love. But it is actually much more than that. One of the talks of the Cursillo retreat teaches that Grace is an invitation from God. We cannot initiate it and we cannot deserve it, because it is God reaching out to us. Grace is not an 'object' we receive, but **it is a relationship** – it is God giving Himself to us. Cursillo teaches that Grace, if we accept it, begins a life-long transformation in us.

There are several forms of Grace. One form of Grace is **Sanctifying Grace**, which has been defined as grace that works within the true believer in such a way as to bring growth, maturity, and progress in the process of becoming Christ-like. I frankly do not know where else Bishop Mary would have the compassion and caring to forgive the driver who hit Michael; or for Pope John Paul to forgive his would-be assassin. It is the grace that empowers you and me to forgive a hurt, a wrong done to us, an injustice suffered.

Another form of Grace is **Sustaining Grace**, which is given at special times of need, especially during adversity or suffering. Hebrews 4:16 says, ‘Let us therefore draw near with confidence **to the throne of grace**, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.’ Mary was sustained through a heartbreaking event in her life. When in your life have you felt that sustaining power - big enough to carry you through a time that you could not make it alone? That is sustaining grace.

The Apostle Paul said that living in grace leads to our sanctification (being made holy – set aside for God’s purpose), and living in grace leads to our eternal life. But he said that it also reaps rewards in this life. God’s grace frees us from being slaves to sin – not free from ever committing sin, or from being tempted by sin, but we are **not slaves to sin**. We are instead made slaves to righteousness. Our lives are committed to making **God** our Master, and making **God’s character** our example.

Jesus had already warned his disciples about the rejection and even persecution they would suffer in the process of being witnesses for him about God’s Kingdom. In today’s reading Jesus describes the rewards that will also come to them. He was describing that the life of Grace has **difficult aspects** and **amazingly wonderful and rewarding aspects** to it.

We can't understand the Christian life unless we understand grace. It is the heart of our faith. It is the heart of our relationship with God. When you understand grace you feel closer to God. The more you understand grace the more you are drawn to God, the more you love God, the more you are grateful to God. It is by grace that God brings us to Him. It is a journey that continues throughout our life.

Our lessons today all illustrate aspects of living a life of grace; it is not about living a life without temptation, or without struggles, or being protected from grief. But **it is about living a life**, with both good and bad, **in committed relationship with God**. (repeat) That is the ideal of the Christian life. It only requires that we accept the invitation into that relationship. Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

Amen.