



“God Bond: Saved by Grace”

Fourth Sunday in Lent
Saturday & Sunday, March 10 - 11, 2018

All Services

The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22;
Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

So how do you know that you are loved? Probably my first experience of love was with my mother. After all she was the one who was the primary care giver for me. She made sure that I had the food to eat, that I cleared my plate and even ate all of the green stuff that was on it. She would take me out once or twice a year to buy clothes so that when I was starting school I had some new clothes to wear. She was the one who was there for me when I was riding my bike and fall and skin my knee, she would take care of it. She was the one who nurtured me to provide for my growth, to take me to all the appointments that I had whether it was going to the doctor or cub scouts or all of the many practices and games that I had growing up. I had the sense that my mother would do anything for me. Indeed, I had the sense probably in the back of my mind that my mom would even die for me.

Karl Barth a famous theologian of the last century who wrote volumes of theological treatises and theologies, epics, Bible studies, was once asked by a report, “What was the greatest theological idea?” Now reporters expecting something profound like, some theological equivalent to Einstein’s Theory of Relativity, you know $E=mc^2$, some theological construct that probably the average person would even have trouble understanding. But Barth simply replied, “*Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.*”

Jesus in the gospel of John puts it another way, “*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.*” And the 17th verse is just as important, “*Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*”

Those two statements actually distinguish Christianity from all other world religions, Buddhism follows the old path to enlightenment. Hindus believed in Karma, your actions continually affect the way that the world treats you. Judaism, of course, has the Ten Commandments and in The Law that implies that God has certain requirements for all of us to follow, and Islam Code of Love really does the same. In all of these there is work to be done by us so that we can somehow deserve enlightenment or deserve

salvation. Have you ever tried to earn the approval from someone else? Maybe a colleague, or a boss, a parent, or a grandparent, a spouse, or maybe even God? Trying to be good enough and keep on going again and again and again. Except that you're just never quite measuring up. Sometimes it can feel like the preverbal hamster on a wheel, the wheel keeps spinning and spinning and spinning, and yet we're not really getting anywhere.

St. Paul in Ephesians has another way of looking at the problem of not measuring up. What he says is that you and I are dead in sin. What happens when you're dead? Really dead, not sick, not dying, not just having a bad day, not just, you know connecting, dead? What can you and I do to help ourselves if we're dead? Paul's answer is quite simply, *absolutely nothing*. Sin and the deadness that it causes corrupts everything, good intentions, good actions, desire, will, intellect, reasoning, in getting us to a life that is possible. Sin is like that after all.

Now at first it can be exciting, whatever "it" is, pride, lust, greed, disobedience, lying, envying, attachment to stuff, but soon there after it becomes an oppressive, a heartless slave driver that takes us far from God and the image that God placed on us. But the Bible proclaims God is rich in mercy so that even when we are dead, when we're dead in sin, Christ makes us alive through his grace. And when we're washed in waters of baptism we come alive, we're given life and that is why God in his mercy reaches out to us with his immeasurable, incomprehensible, unfathomable love. A love that would even sacrifice a son for us.

God in the person of Jesus Christ is life, death, and resurrection, gives himself for you and for me and salvation is not something for us just simply to wait upon, but something that is always delivered. By grace, Paul says, you have been saved. Notice he's saying that in past tense. It is already accomplished and the cost of that has been great, the cost, Jesus' death on the cross. Love, mercy, salvation, grace, these are character traits of our God offered by God to you and to me, a free gift that can't be earned, it can't be worked up to. He takes away all of our failures and frailties our imperfections and offenses, he offers us love. We who sometimes spiritually struggle, who are dead with sin living a broken relationship with God and others, this can only be mended by a relationship with God's life. He gives us his grace and makes us alive.

And what is grace? Grace is going to a person that you have hurt in the past and you hear the words come out of their mouth, *I forgive you*. Grace is a child who meets a couple for the first time at an orphanage or group home and when they meet her they look at her and they say, she's perfect. Grace is coming in to a darkened church sanctuary where in a crisis and yet you have a profound sense that you're not alone. Grace is the power that God gives someone addicted to say no and to turn their lives around. It's when you get that call in the middle of the night from one of your kids and they just called because they wanted to tell you how much they love you. Grace is God sending his son, the ultimate sacrifice for us, Grace is his invitation to fix. Grace is the most powerful force in the universe, it flows from God's nature like a river that flows in Spring time. It cleanses us from sin, it frees us to serve, it inspires and transforms us to be God's people caring and sharing, loving and supporting, good works as a way of life.

We are saved by grace. You and I need it, we can't live without it. We can't buy it and we can't earn it, but through it God creates a bond that lasts even through death. By grace we have been saved. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

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