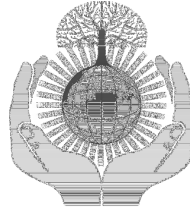


GRACE UPON GRACE



**"The grace of God means something like this:
Here is your life. You might never have been, but you are
because the party wouldn't have been complete without you.
Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen.
Don't be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us.
It's for you I created the universe. I love you. There's only one catch.
Like any other gift, the gift of grace can be yours
only if you'll reach out and take it.
Maybe being able to reach out and take it is a gift, too."**

Scripture:

John 1:11-18

11. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.
12. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God,
13. who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.
14. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.
15. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me."')
16. From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace.
17. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
18. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Verse 14 might well be the greatest single verse in the New Testament:

**14. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory,
the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.**



GRACE AND TRUTH

The author of this book, whom we often refer to as John, has a love for two great words that haunt his mind and dominate his thought. They are in this passage. When I think of John, I think of the words *grace* and *truth*.

TRUTH

The word "*Truth*" dominates the Fourth Gospel. We meet it again and again.

- (a) Jesus is the embodiment of the truth. He said: "I am the truth." (John 14:6)

- (b) Jesus is the communicator of the truth.
- (c) Even when Jesus left this earth in the body, he left us his Spirit to guide us into the truth. His Spirit is the Spirit of truth. (John 14:17; John 15:26; John 16:13) He did not leave us only a book of instruction and a body of teaching. We do not need to search through some unintelligible textbook to find out what to do. Still, to this day, we can ask Jesus what to do, for his Spirit is with us every step of the way.
- (d) Jesus proclaims: The truth is what makes us free. (John 8:32)

GRACE

The second word is “*Grace*.” Grace has two meanings:

- (a) Grace is the idea of something completely undeserved. Grace is something that we could never have earned nor achieved for ourselves. God came to earth to live and to die for people not because humanity deserved it; but this is the expression of God’s pure love. Grace emphasizes the spiritual needs of people, and the limitless kindness of God.
- (b) Grace embodies the idea of beauty. In Modern Greek the word means charm. In Jesus, we see the sheer winsomeness of God. Something about God is attractive. People had thought of God in terms of might and majesty and power and judgment. In Jesus, humans are confronted with the sheer loveliness of God.

**We have experienced ‘grace upon grace.’
In Christ we discover that God is both attractive and kind.
Upon this, we build our church, in hope that others will find it too.
Grace is our anchor in tough times, and it is our mission when we ask God, “What shall we do?”**

MAPS AND CHARTS

Do you know the difference between a map and a chart?

A **chart**, especially a nautical chart, has special unique characteristics including a very detailed and accurate representation of the coastline, which takes into account varying tidal levels and water forms critical to a navigator.

A **map**, on the other hand, emphasizes land forms, including the representation of relief, with shoreline represented as an approximate delineation usually at mean sea level.

A **chart** is a working document. It is used to plot courses for navigators to follow in order to transit a certain area. It takes into account special conditions required for one's vessel, such as draft, bottom clearance, wrecks and obstructions which can be hazardous. A chart shows places where special maneuvers might be required to avoid running aground.

A **map** on the other hand is a static document. A map is not, and can not be, used to plot a course. Rather it provides a predetermined course, usually a road, path, etc., to be followed. Maps provide predetermined points - road intersections - to allow one a choice to change to another predetermined direction.

Charts provide detailed information on the area beneath the water surface, normally not visible to the naked eye, which is very critical for safe and efficient navigation.

Maps merely indicate a surface path providing no information of the condition of the road. For instance a map will not provide information on whether the road is under repair (except when it is a new road) or how many pot holes or other obstructions it may contain. However the driver is able to make a visual assessment of such conditions.

A map tells you the rules; a chart helps you find your way.

THINK THEOLOGICALLY

Think theologically with me about charts and maps. Maps are the ways; charts are the means.

Jesus is a chart. Our scriptures say that leads us to God's grace upon grace.

16. *From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace.*

17. *The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*

A map will not lead you to salvation. The law can only protect you from those who would break the law.

But grace can lead you to the Kingdom of God. This is the life of Truth and Grace.

If I had to pick between a great preacher, and a great pastor, I would look for a great pastor, because that is what I need.

In your lifetime, you have received grace upon grace, and you know it.

Jesus says, "Remember it."

Here is your life. You might never have been, but you are here because the party wouldn't have been complete without you.

Here is the world. It is beautiful, but terrible things can happen and will happen.

Don't be afraid. God is with you. Through Christ, God says, nothing can ever separate us. It's for you I created the universe. I love you.

There's only one catch. Like any other gift, the gift of grace can be yours only if you'll reach out and take it. Maybe being able to reach out and take it is a gift too.

The good news is that it doesn't matter where you have been, what matters is where you are going.

Roads were made by people.

Life was created by God.

In order to navigate roads, you will need a map. To live a life of faith, you will need a chart. Here is the good news: God sent you one.

BLUE HIGHWAYS

When I go for a ride, I like to go in a circle. When I go to town, I like to return home by another way.

When I get out of town, I am a blue highway traveler. If you are a blue highway traveler too, you know that the blue highways are not always the fastest way to get there. When the destination is more important than the journey, then only a freeway will do, and they are usually marked in red on the maps. But if there is a choice, the blue highways offer unusual places to eat, and out of the ordinary things to see.

If you are going to travel blue highways, you are going to need God's grace.

- For me, going to seminary was one of my blue highways. But I took the path because I thought it would lead me to God's grace. And on four days out of five, I think it did.
- Traveling to Israel was a blue highway for me. I didn't know what to expect en route; I wasn't sure what I would see when I got there. I just knew that the destination was very important.
- When Cheryl and I married forty years ago, we didn't know where the roads would lead, we didn't know that there would be three daughters, and their husbands and friends, and four grandchildren. So the day that we were joined in marriage, we set out upon the journey of life, and God updated the charts all along the way.

These are just three of my own stories.

There are times when we all travel the blue highways instead of the freeways. Where have the blue highways taken you, and what was the grace you needed to bring you safely home?

HERE'S WHAT THE CHARTS SAY

No matter how lost, God can find you, and help you chart the way home. Charts are like the grace of God. There is no penalty for late arrivals.

Grace is like the World Communion we celebrate today. It proclaims the most important need in our life ... the need for spiritual nourishment, and it provides us a community and a sacrament by which to experience it.

Grace is enjoying God's riches at Christ's expense.

GRACE IS GETTING A SECOND CHANCE.

I once was lost, but now I'm found.

We are more susceptible to grace when we are starting over than when we have everything together. When we are starting over, we open ourselves to discovering the real person inside ourselves.

Here's a clever essay by a young woman that she called, "*Grace Anatomy*." Clever title!

"i just made a huge decision in my life. it's a huge change - a step backward so i can move forward. i am not really sure if this is what i need to move forward but i have decided to take the risk. take the risk now or always look back and wonder what if. actually i don't really have to take the risk. i'm ok with where i am now. well, ok but not fine. something can be done to upgrade the ok. so i am taking this risk in the hopes that the ok will be better.

"thought of starting all over again at 25 bothered me. i was really bothered that i even cried while telling my mom about the news. and i don't normally do that. i think the ego was the one taking over at that moment."

Starting over at twenty-five can be tough, but by God's grace it is not impossible.

How about starting over at age fifty following a divorce?

How about starting over at age fifty-eight following a career change?

How about starting over at sixty-five after retirement?

How about starting over after a loss, a disaster, or a foreclosure?

God has given us grace upon grace.

Not a first chance, but a second, a third, a fourth, and more.

A QUIET TIME

I'd like to have a quiet time for thinking in our sermon today.

Listen to two beautiful tunes performed by Yo Yo Ma.

As you hear the first, think about the grace you have needed.

As you hear the second, think about the grace you have been given.

**MUSIC – "Gabriel's Oboe" and "The Falls" by Ennio Morricone performed by Yo Yo Ma
Album – Yo Yo Ma plays Ennio Morricone**

There is no one in this room who is not heir to God's grace.

World communion recognizes this gift.

This church exists FOR God's grace.

If you have a spiritual need, that is the very most important thing in your life.

This church exists BECAUSE OF God's grace.



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