

OUR REDEEMER LUTHERAN CHURCH
4th S. in Lent
Eph. 2:8-10

Iowa City, Iowa
March 15, 2015

“Grace Works”

JJ

We are going to talk about “grace” today, and our text provides one of the best places to go as we deal with the subject of grace. “For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not because of works lest anyone boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

The title of this message—“Grace Works”—is to be understood in two ways, emphasizing each word. First of all, GRACE works; grace really works! “It is by grace you have been saved.”

God’s grace—His undeserved love—caused Him to send Jesus to save the world, to save us! John 3:16 says it clearly: “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”

Because Jesus took our place on the cross, because He went through death and the grave and came out alive, we have forgiveness and life. We are saved—by grace!

Actor Kevin Bacon recounted when his 6-year-old son saw the movie “Footloose” for the first time: He said, “Hey, Dad, you know that thing in the movie where you swing from the rafters of that building? That’s really cool! How did you do that?” I said, “Well, I didn’t do that part. It was a stunt man.” “What’s a stunt man?” he asked. “That’s someone who dresses like me and does things I can’t do.” “Oh,” he replied and walked out of the room looking a little confused. A little later he said, “Hey, Dad, you know that thing in the movie where you spin around on that gym bar and land on your feet? How did you do that?” I said, “Well, I didn’t do that. It was a gymnastics double.” “What’s a gymnastics double?” he asked “That’s a guy who dresses in my clothes and does things I can’t do.” There was silence from my son, then he asked in a concerned voice, “And...what did you do?” “I got all the glory,” I sheepishly replied.

In a similar way, Jesus took our place, dressed in our flesh and blood, did what we were unable to do—living a perfect life and dying on the cross for all our sins—and we receive all the blessings of forgiveness, life and salvation. Yes, Grace works.

Furthermore, grace works to bring help to the helpless. J.S. Bach wrote two letters, JJ, or two Latin words over many of his compositions—Jesu Juva—“Jesus help me.”

It would be good to erect that as a banner over our everyday lives: Jesus, Help me. Talked with someone dealing with numerous problems; Prayer: “Help!” That is the plea of one who trusts not in himself but totally trusts in God’s grace. As we sing, “Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me.”

And grace works to drive out fear: The fear that our evil deeds will be discovered. The fear of condemnation. The person who lives in the dark of evil and sin does not care to be exposed. Here is where God’s Law goes to work. God’s Law, serving as a mirror, shows us our sin; for example, our sin of thinking we don’t need God’s help in order to be saved. Why not? Because we think our sins aren’t that serious or the ones we have, well, we do enough good things to cancel out the evil we do.

Realizing our sin, we confess to God and God's grace assures us of forgiveness. Therefore, we no longer have the fear of condemnation. Jesus came not to condemn the world, but that the world would be saved through Him. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1

The alternative to living under grace is to live in an uncertain world of always asking "When have I done enough to satisfy God?" Grace says Jesus has done enough to satisfy God, and therefore we need not fear.

And that includes the fear of death. "whoever believes in Jesus will not perish but have eternal life." Yes, we will face physical death, but by the grace of God, we have the promise of eternal life.

Grace works! Not because we are perfect, sinless and live an error-free life! But because we have a gracious, loving Father in heaven who through Jesus our Savior loves us in spite of our sins and transgressions. God desires that we live not under the cloud of condemnation but under the bright rays of His grace in Jesus Christ.

GRACE WORKS! IT REALLY WORKS!

Now the other part of this message: Grace WORKS! V. 10 "We are God's workmanship..." We are not intended to be spiritual sponges—soaking it all up and doing nothing. God has "graced" us in order to equip us to do certain good works—different tasks for each of us; different tasks for different times. Grace WORKS!

God has created us to make a difference in the lives of others. The gifts and abilities we have are God's way of showing His love for our neighbor through us. Our serving is not to be seen as drudgery but as opportunity. We are not to spend our time wishing we had the abilities someone else has but rather giving thanks for and rejoicing in how God has gifted us.

Romans 12:6-8 puts it well: "So we are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us. If our gift is to speak God's message, we should do it according to the faith that we have; if it is to serve, we should serve; if it is to teach, we should teach; if it is to encourage others, we should do so. Whoever shares with others, should do it generously. Whoever has authority should work hard; whoever shows kindness to others should do it cheerfully."

God has created you in a unique way, He has prepared you in a special way to carry out His work. This is grace at work. Nowhere is it explained more beautifully than St. Paul in 1 Cor. 12 where St. Paul is inspired to talk about the working of the human body. There is cooperation and coordination among the parts of our body that is truly amazing. This is how it is to be among us in the Church. Different people. Different gifts. Working together for God's purposes.

God has planned for us to work and serve together so that we might give evidence of God's grace at work in our lives. May the Holy Spirit enable and empower us to live grace-filled lives—knowing and believing we are saved by grace and then living to put that grace within us to work for the good of others and to the glory of God.

Oh Holy Spirit, help us each to understand how we are gifted and then help us connect our gifts to useful endeavors. AMEN.