

Sermon Note: Finding Grace

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Introduction

This Sunday begins *Knowing Who We Are*, a six-week series in our year of considering what it means to be United Methodist. Recently, we have explored our history and our baptismal promises, and over these next six weeks, we'll journey through grace, our practice of faith, and look again at our beliefs as United Methodists.

In 1742, John Wesley asked, "Who is a Methodist?" His answer, rooted in Romans 5:5, was that a Methodist is one who has the love of God poured into their heart through the Holy Spirit. Wesley wrote that God loves first, makes peace possible through Jesus Christ, and continues working in us to form endurance, character, and hope.

After Jesus' resurrection, the eleven remaining disciples needed every part of that grace. When Jesus met them on a mountain in Galilee, they worshipped him even while some still doubted. Jesus still called this uncertain group to make disciples, to baptize, and to teach, all while promising to remain with them every day.

Illustration Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZ1q3_UX9g

In this clip from *Chariots of Fire* (1981), Eric Liddell tells his sister Jenny that he still plans to serve in China and explains why he wants to run first.

Why This Video?

Jenny knows that Eric intends to serve as a missionary in China. Eric confirms that purpose, then tells her that running belongs to his understanding of God's call too. "God made me for a purpose, for China," he says, "and he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure."

Eric refuses to treat his ability as a distraction from faithful service. He believes God gave him both a purpose and the ability to run, and he wants to honor God through both. Eric's desire to honor God through running may be seen as a way he responds to what God has already given him.

Video Discussion Questions

1. Eric tells Jenny that he has decided to go to China as planned and that he wants to run first. What do you hear in the way he explains these two decisions?
2. Eric says God made him "for a purpose, for China" and also made him fast. Have you ever felt called toward two good purposes at the same time? How did you understand their relationship? What did you do?
3. Eric explains, "When I run, I feel his pleasure." When have you felt most fully yourself while doing something you believe God gave you the ability to do?

4. Eric says giving up running would be “to hold him in contempt.” What do you think he means? Why do you think he understands refusing his ability as an act of dishonor? Do you see it the same way?
5. Jenny and Eric are discussing how a faithful life should look. When have you disagreed with someone you respect about the right way to respond to God’s call? What helped you through the conversation? What was the result?
6. Eric says, “It’s not just fun to win, it’s to honor him.” What distinction is he making between enjoyment and purpose? Do those two ever go together in your own life?
7. Eric has made a decision and still takes time to explain it to Jenny. What do you learn from the way he shares his personal sense of call with someone who may see it differently?

Romans 5:1-5 (CEB)

¹Therefore, since we have been made righteous through his faithfulness, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²We have access by faith into this grace in which we stand through him, and we boast in the hope of God’s glory. ³But not only that! We even take pride in our problems, because we know that trouble produces endurance, ⁴endurance produces character, and character produces hope. ⁵This hope doesn’t put us to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Matthew 28:16-20 (CEB)

¹⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸Jesus came near and spoke to them, “I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”

Scripture Study Questions

1. Paul begins by saying that we have been made righteous and have peace with God through Jesus Christ. How do you understand this peace? Have you ever experienced anything like it?
2. Paul describes “this grace in which we stand.” What does it mean to receive grace as a gift? Have you ever had a hard time accepting a gift? Why can this be difficult?
3. Paul connects trouble, endurance, character, and hope. Does this sequence match your experience? If so, how? If not, why not? Has endurance ever helped you feel hope?
4. Paul writes that God’s love “has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.” What do you think this says about God’s actions and our response? How would you describe that love in your own words?
5. The eleven disciples worship Jesus, even though some still doubt. What do you think about their response? Have faith and doubt ever coexisted for you?
6. Jesus calls the disciples to go, make disciples, baptize, and teach. Do you ever see people helping others grow as disciples? What would it look like to join in this work?
7. Jesus promises, “I myself will be with you every day.” How do you understand Jesus’ call alongside that assurance? What do you think changes when you believe God is already present in the work?

8. In Romans, God pours love into our hearts. In Matthew, Jesus calls disciples to share what they've received. Do you think that receiving God's grace and participating in God's work go together? What does this mean for you in your life?

Additional (Optional) Questions

1. Where can you recognize God's love at work in your life before you were aware of it or knew how to respond?
2. When have you accepted forgiveness and experienced a new sense of peace with God or another person?
3. Where do you see God helping you grow in love, patience, or holiness right now? What kind of person could this growth help you to become?
4. When have you treated a shared calling as a project you had to finish alone? What could be possible when working alongside others?
5. If someone asked why you are United Methodist, what would you say? Does your answer include grace? How important is grace to your faith?
6. How could our congregation help people receive God's love and participate in God's work? What specifically could we do?

Weekly Action

John Wesley asked: "Who is a Methodist?" Write down your response on paper or in a digital note. Begin with God's grace, then describe how our Wesleyan tradition invites us to respond to God's grace. Keep your response where you will see it during the week.

This week, add two brief examples to the same page or digital note: a moment when you *received* grace and a moment when you *shared* it. With those moments in mind, has your original response changed? Is anything clearer or more complicated? At the end of the week, read your response to Wesley's question and consider sharing it with a loved one or a trusted spiritual partner.

Prayer

God of grace, you love us first and pour your love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Give us peace through Jesus Christ. Form endurance, character, and hope in us when trouble comes. Help us to receive your grace with gratitude and to respond with love. Call us into your work, teach us to serve together, and remind us that you are with us every day. Make our lives signs of the grace you offer to all people. Through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

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