

“OUR GOD OF GREAT MERCY AND AMAZING GRACE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: Ephesians 2:1-9

Prayer:

Holy Father, your perfect and complete wisdom and knowledge fill us with comfort and truth; your awesome power fills us with fear; your omnipresence makes every place holy ground. Now open our eyes and ears, our homes and our church, to the wonder of your great mercy and amazing grace, in the name of Jesus and for His sake, amen.

Introduction.

God is infinite and eternal. That means that all the attributes of God are infinite and eternal. That means that I could preach for a year on each attribute and not plumb the depths of each one. We will spend eternity making new discoveries every day about each of God's attributes. So to devote one sermon to each attribute is just a drop in the bucket and to devote one sermon to two attributes borders on sheer folly.

Grace and mercy are often put together when we are talking about the attributes of God or the characteristics of God.

Mercy can be defined as not getting what we do deserve; and *grace* defined as getting what we don't deserve. Mercy is that we don't end up in hell, which we all deserve. Grace is ending up in heaven which none of us deserve.

Mercy is God's goodness toward those in misery and distress.

Grace is God's goodness toward those who deserve only punishment.

Great Mercy.

Mercy is the attitude and inclination of God's heart. He is disposed to be compassionate. It's not a mood that comes and goes, as if on a whim. It is not fickle or capricious (unreliable).

His mercy is eternal, from everlasting past to everlasting future. Nothing that has happened on earth can change the tender mercies of God. No human being, neither you nor I, can act in a way to lessen His mercy or alter it in any way. His kindness and favor and pity and compassion are boundless, without limit. God can never cease to be merciful.

If the fall had never taken place God would still be merciful but it would be unknown. The holy angels know nothing of God's mercy. We know God's great mercy because of all our pain and

suffering, all our guilt and shame, all our tears and heartache. It is human misery and sin that puts God's mercy supremely on display. David in his sin and distress cried out:

II Samuel 24:14 I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is great.

Two blind men called to Jesus, "Have mercy on us, Son of David" (Matthew 9:27).

Paul writing about affliction and comfort says: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort" (II Corinthians 1:3).

What do we deserve? What do we have a right to? What have we earned? What does Ephesians say?

Were we not dead in so many trespasses and sins?

Did we not walk following the paths and ways of this world?

Did we not imitate the prince of the power of the air, that evil spirit who works in all who are disobedient?

Did we not live in the lusts and passions of our flesh, carrying out our own desires?

Were we not all children of God's just and justified wrath?

Were we not all destined for the punishment that awaits all fallen mankind?

Were we not enemies of God, alienated from Him?

If mercy depended on us being worthy, no one would receive any. But to all who repent and believe what do they receive? What does Scripture say?

We shall see God as He is, face to face.

We shall have His name written on our foreheads.

We shall be called the sons and daughters of God.

We shall receive every spiritual blessings in the heavenly places.

We shall enjoy eternal fellowship with God in the joy of heaven.

God delights to give mercy, it is a joy to Him. This is why there is rejoicing in heaven over one sinner saved. This is why the prodigal's father ran to him and made a big fuss and a big feast.

God has always dealt with mankind with mercy, and when His mercy is rejected or despised, then He acts with justice.

Like a bee which by nature produces honey, and only stings when provoked, so is God's mercy and justice. He is slow to anger and quick to mercy.

Don't abuse God's mercy or presume on it or take it for granted. Don't say since God is so merciful it doesn't matter what I do. It's true where sin abounds, mercy abounds more. But to

sin because mercy abounds is devil talk. That's like cutting yourself because you know your body heals. If we sin because of God's mercy, mercy will become our judge without mercy.

To receive mercy we must first know we are in need of mercy and then believe God is merciful and that He delights to show mercy and He is quick to show mercy. Through Jesus Christ God's mercy is freely available to all who believe and ask.

Amazing Grace.

As mercy is unmerited, so God's grace is a gift, without any obligation on His part. God's grace is completely free from any outside influence or pressure or coercion.

Exodus 33:19 I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

Romans 3:23-24 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Since it's a gift, we have no claim on it. There is nothing we can do to win God's acceptance or favor.

This is why grace is foolishness to some and despised by others, because it leaves no room for the pride of man and the self-righteousness we cling to and love so much.

The Gospel treats us all like guilty, condemned, hopeless criminals and that's offensive to many. It treats the morally, upright pious person the same as the worst pagan, and that injures our pride. The Gospel levels the playing field, every descendent of Adam is a hell-deserving, helpless sinner.

The only hope for us is to cast ourselves on the mercy of God and hold out our empty hands to be filled with His grace. Salvation doesn't depend on how good we have been, and salvation is not denied based on how sinful we have been.

God delights to give gifts to those who absolutely deserve nothing. We who are poor, wretched, pitiful, needy and guilty receive the kindness of God through Jesus Christ.

We are like Mephibosheth being brought from the enemy camp to David's palace and told that everything taken from him will be restored and he will now eat at the king's table as one of his own sons.

We are like the prodigal sinner being embraced and given a robe and sandals and a ring and the fatten calf killed and a party started.

The glory of God shines incredibly bright when we consider how unlikely a candidate we are and how unworthy we are. That He would freely give the gift of His grace to me a great sinner is more than I can fathom. As I get older and as God wants me to see more of His grace, He shows me more of my sin.

There was a man who hated Christians. And he turned his hate into action and began killing Christians. He deprived wives of their husbands; he deprived children of their parents. And the taste of blood made him even more bloodthirsty and he exported his violence to other cities. He breathed out murderous threats and carried them out.

Yet the inexhaustible treasures of the riches of God's grace found him and now Paul is counted among the greatest of the apostles of grace.

Practical implications and applications.

How do we imitate God's mercy and grace in our attitudes and conduct toward our own sin and the sins of others?

As members of First Christian Reformed Church and brothers and sisters in Christ, how do we imitate God's mercy and grace in our attitudes and conduct toward you own sin and the sins of others? The simplest rule of thumb in all of Scripture is the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would want done unto you."

There are some responses on our part that *would not* be appropriate and some that *would* be appropriate.

First, what sort of responses would not be appropriate?

First, it would not be right for us to look down on or despise a sinner. Every one of us is a sinner. This is why the Son of God had to die on the Cross for us. He bore our sins and suffered our punishment. Otherwise, we would be without hope in this world and the next. We must remember that, according to Scripture, we are all capable of all the same sins, no matter how bad. The Word of God says:

1 Corinthians 10:12 *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.*

Second, it would not be right for us to consider any sinner to be unforgiveable. What kind of people are we? We're the same kind of people who were in the church of the New Testament. I Corinthians 6:9-11 describes the members of the New Testament church:

*Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. **Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our***

God.

The Corinthian church was made up of the most notorious sinners, men and women enslaved to all manner of sensuality and violence and criminal activity, yet they were washed by the blood of Jesus and sanctified by the power of the Holy Spirit and justified by the tender mercies of a gracious God. None who are repentant are beyond the reach of God, and such are we.

Third, it would not be right for us to add evil to evil by engaging in slander, or gossip, or trying to dig for details that you don't need to know. How would you want to be treated or talked about? Leave the details to the elders, you talk to God in prayer.

If these are the ways we ought not to respond, how should we respond?

First, it is right for us to give thanks to God, that He brings our sin to light. Discipline by God is a sign of God's mercy and goodness to us and our church. It is God's love that brings us to our senses quickly before our hearts are hardened by continual sin.

Second, it is right for us to give thanks to God that He has allowed us to be a part of a church where we receive biblical discipline and counsel from the elders. We are not left to suffer alone. This is a church that loves and prays and cares. As you have ministered to Phama and me and our family, so I call you to minister to those among us dealing with sin. This is the work of the church and we should praise God that He's given us love and compassion for one another.

Third, it is right for us each to turn to humble ourselves before God at this time. Remember again God's words from 1 Corinthians 10:12-13:

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man.

All of us face many temptations that are common to all and many give in to them. Some are enslaved to secret sins, in bondage to addictions, feeling helpless. Now is the time to seek out someone, a pastor, an elder, a friend and confessor. Also, each of us should remember again God's words from Galatians 6:1-2:

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

Fourth, it is right for us to have compassion on those who are broken. And our compassion should not just be thoughts and words, but deeds. Compassion doesn't turn away from them, being too embarrassed to say anything. Rather, compassion thinks, "There but for the grace of God go I," and then invites them for coffee, dinner, a game night, or a long walk. Compassion takes them food, gives them money to help with expenses, or sends a card or note of encouragement. Compassion weeps with those who weep and bends its shoulders to carry them over the rough places. Compassion is a concrete virtue, intensely loving and practical.

It is our loving privilege as a church family to support those in special need. Let us pray for them. Let us not spend time in speculation or gossip. Let us guard one another and ourselves. Let us fight our sin.

And when we fall, let us humbly admit it and seek help so that our families and we ourselves will not be casualties of "the deceitfulness of sin"--any sin (Hebrews 3:13). Above all, let us hope in God who came to save his people from their sins by His great mercy and amazing grace.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Let us pray: Holy Father and God of all mercy and grace. No human mind could have ever conceived or made up a God like you who from before the foundations of the earth planned to act in mercy and grace toward those who sin against you. We stand in need of our infinite mercy and grace and pray now that you will send us from here better understanding it and more deeply applying it to our needs and the needs of those around us. Pour out your Spirit of repentance and faith, of mercy and grace, and deliver us from the deceptions and lies of Satan. Glorify yourself in our midst for the sake of Jesus