

SERMON TITLE: "Saved by Grace: Glorious Grace"
SERMON TEXT: Ephesians 1:3-14
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James
OCCASION: August 14, 2022, at First UMC

INTRODUCTION

Yesterday I read an article that indicated that longevity is correlated to balance and strength. The article said that three good indicators of how much longer we'll live are our ability to 1) rise up from the floor to a standing position, 2) balance on one leg for 30 seconds with one eye closed, and 3) walk at a brisk pace.

Unfortunately, I've never been very coordinated. My body just doesn't always do what my mind tells it to. When I was a kid, growing by leaps and bounds, my body was even more awkward. When I would bump and bumble around, my mom would sometimes say to me, "Kim, we should have named you *Grace*. Maybe then, you'd have been less clumsy." Yes, it would have been nice to have been born more poised and nimble, to have inherited more athletic competence and confidence. Fortunately, though, gracefulness isn't completely determined by our physical aptitude. As I grew from childhood into adolescence, I learned about a kind of grace that comes not from our bodies but from the heart of God. I learned that I could be saved by God's glorious grace.

Since I'm probably not the only one who could use a bit more gracefulness, I've decided to focus our attention on this foundational concept for the rest of this month of August. Since grace is such a basic factor in our salvation, it seems like we ought to spend a few weeks trying to understand it. So, let's start today by defining and describing what Ephesians 1:6 calls God's "glorious grace."

1—GOD'S WILL AND DESIRE

According to Ephesians 1:3-14, grace is glorious because, first of all, it originates in God's will and desire. Verse four tells us that God "chose us in Christ." We don't receive God's merciful love and forgiveness because we earn it, because we deserve it, or because of who our family is. Grace isn't an

entitlement. Grace is a gift of God's will. As the famous saying goes, "God loves you, and there's nothing you can do about it." It isn't about us and what we have or haven't done. God's loving and forgiving mercy is about who God is and what God wants to do. When we receive glorious grace, it's because God wants to give us grace.

Verse five tells us that "God destined us for adoption as God's children." While a child can hope to be adopted and embrace or rebel against an adoption, no child has the power to make an adoption happen. As an adoptive parent myself, I can tell you that social workers, judges, and potential parents are the ones who initiate the adoption process. The same goes with God, in matters of grace. We children can open our hearts to the mercy of God or reject it, but only God can offer it to us. And God does offer this compassionate love to us because God very much wants to claim us, name us, and include us in God's family.

We see God's will and desire in the descriptive action words of this passage. In verses six and eight, we see that God "freely bestowed" and "lavished" this glorious grace upon us. In verse nine, the writer indicates that God "made known . . . his will." In verse 10, God's will of glorious grace is identified as God's "plan." In verse 11, glorious grace is accomplished by God's "purpose . . . counsel and will." And according to verses 12 and 14, God does all this for our redemption and for the praise of divine glory.

Do you see what I mean about intentionality? Glorious grace doesn't just happen to us or come upon us by accident, and it certainly doesn't originate in ourselves. This grace is glorious because it comes from God's will and desire.

2—ABUNDANT

A second aspect of glorious grace is that it's abundant. When Ephesians 1:6-8 tells us that God "freely bestowed" and "lavished" grace upon us, there's a sense of largess, that God's grace is infinite in scope. Likewise, verse three indicates that this glorious grace is associated with "every spiritual

blessing.” And, if we don’t yet comprehend how hugely amazing that is, we should note that we’re talking about every spiritual blessing “in the heavenly places.” In verse seven, “the riches of [God’s] grace” assure us that there’s no impoverishment, lack, or shortage. In verse eight, we see that this great resource comes “with *all* wisdom and insight.” According to verses 10 and 11, our God who offers this abundant grace will “gather up *all* things” and “accomplish *all* things.” Do you hear how comprehensive that is? God isn’t stingy, and grace isn’t a little bit, to be doled out here and there, as a too-precious commodity. No. God’s grace is glorious because it’s so abundant.

Earlier in the worship service we sang a hymn that proclaims the “wideness in God’s mercy” that’s “like the wideness of the sea.” That’s pretty abundant, don’t you think? Another hymn proclaims, “Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt! . . . Grace, grace, God’s grace, grace that is greater than all our sin!”

In Christian faith, there are no supply chain disruptions or empty shelves. There’s no shortage or insufficiency of what we need for our forgiveness and salvation. No matter what we’ve done wrong, God’s glorious grace is abundant.

3—LIFELONG

A third attribute of God’s glorious grace is that it’s lifelong. God’s merciful love isn’t offered to us just at one point in time, and then we’re out of luck. No. God’s forgiving power is present and available for all the phases and stages of our lives.

In verse four, we see that “God chose us before the foundation of the world.” John Wesley, the founding father of Methodism, called that “prevenient grace,” the grace that comes before we’re even born. Even before we become aware of our need for God’s mercy, God’s loving compassion is already willing and able, coming before and even preventing many of the wrong things we might do, much like early childhood baptism and Christian education help nurture our spirit, tune our conscience, steer us away from trouble, and give us a basic foundation for our Christian faith and life.

But God's glorious grace isn't limited to the earliest years of our lives and faith. God's glorious grace is available to us later also. Ephesians 1:7 reminds us of the redemption available to us through the blood of Christ. When God's son Jesus was unjustly crucified, instead of unleashing divine wrath upon humanity, God instead chose to forgive. God turned the horror of murder and the guilt of crucifixion into an opportunity for mercy and salvation.

John Wesley called that "justifying grace"—the kind of grace provided to us after we've grown up enough to recognize our guilt and to seek and trust God's forgiveness. That kind of redeeming, or justifying, grace wipes away our sins and gives us a fresh start. To borrow the expression Jesus used with Nicodemus, it's as if we're "born again." While some Christians talk about being born again as a once-and-done thing, most of us Christians would testify to needing and obtaining this kind of glorious cleansing grace quite regularly throughout our lives. Whenever we have a pang or attack of guilt, whenever we become aware that we've done something wrong, we can go before our Lord to seek and receive this redeeming grace. Through God's glorious justifying grace, the slate is cleaned, just as if we'd never sinned.

The truth that God wants to offer us grace throughout our lives doesn't mean, however, that we should callously keep on sinning. No conscientious Christian feels good about abusing the mercy of God and turning it into cheap grace. Consequently, our goal is to become more and more like Christ, to become more and more holy, to become more and more perfected in God's love. According to Ephesians 1:12 and 13, God's desire for us is that we would "live for the praise of God's glory," "marked with the . . . Holy Spirit," as "God's own people." John Wesley taught that this ongoing faith formation, spiritual maturation, and perfecting in love is possible for us because of God's "sanctifying grace."

God's grace is glorious because it doesn't just baptize us as children, confirm us as youth, and then leave us to our own devices and troubles. No, God's glorious sanctifying grace is provided throughout our lifetime to challenge and empower us to keep on growing in holiness and in our walk

with Christ. No matter how long it's been since our initiation into Christian faith, no matter how old we are, no matter how faithful or sinful we've been, there's always more grace to keep us moving in the right direction. There's grace available at every step along life's journey. God's grace is glorious because it's lifelong.

CONCLUSION

In a few minutes, we will participate in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Communion is often referred to as a means of grace. In the simple elements of bread and grape juice, God's mercy comes to us. Through the body and blood of Christ, we are forgiven, refreshed, and renewed for faith and holiness. In our congregation, we generally serve Holy Communion once per month. Usually, we engage in this ritual on the first or second Sunday of each month, depending on what else is happening.

In some denominations, there are requirements before a person can participate in Holy Communion. Maybe you have to be a certain age, take some classes, and/or join the church. In the United Methodist tradition, Holy Communion is open to anyone who is repentant of their sin and desires to receive the grace of Christ. We practice an open communion table because we believe that God's grace is like that. It's glorious because it originates in God's will and desire. It's glorious because it's abundant. And it's glorious because it's available to us our whole life long.

We'll talk more about grace in the coming weeks. But what I want you to hear today is that we aren't just saved by grace. We're saved by glorious grace!