



Worship Service Theme: Grace
Fifth Sunday of Lent

Helpful Elements:
Purple table covering (Lenten Season)

Welcome: Welcome! Thank you for coming to our service today. My name is _____ and I'll be leading our worship time. Today is the fifth Sunday of Lent, the 40 days leading up to Easter, a time of reflecting on our humanity and God's glory. We use the color purple during Lent as the color of repentance and forgiveness. Today we'll be looking at the idea of **grace**.

Please pray with me as we open our time together.

Opening Prayer: Great and loving God, we ask that your Holy Spirit bless our time together and to refresh us with your presence. In the midst of a world full of trouble and strife, we thank you for watching over us, guiding us, and as we confess our sins, for forgiving us. Enable us to enter your presence today joyfully and reverently, and let us depart with the assurance that our sins are forgiven. Fill us, O God, with the peace which passes understanding. Amen.

Opening Hymn: Doxology

Statement of Faith: Let us affirm our statement of faith by reciting Psalm 23 together:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Suggested Hymns:

For the Beauty of the Earth

Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us

Amazing Grace

First Reading: Jeremiah 31

¹Thus says the Lord:

“The people who survived the sword
found grace in the wilderness;

when Israel sought for rest,

³ the Lord appeared to him from far away.

I have loved you with an everlasting love;

therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

...

²⁰Is Ephraim my dear son?

Is he my darling child?

For as often as I speak against him,

I do remember him still.

Therefore my heart yearns for him;

I will surely have mercy on him,
declares the Lord.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Suggested Hymns:

Holy, Holy, Holy

Jesus Loves Me

Second reading: Ephesians 2: 4-9. The apostle Paul starts this section by talking about how we have all fallen short and done bad things. Then come the great words: “*But God...*”

⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which God loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the coming ages God might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Suggested Hymns:
Softy and Tenderly
Leaning on the Everlasting Arms

Interactive Homily: Let's think a bit more about grace.

- In the Bible, people often ask God for grace, and God is described as gracious, or full of grace. How would you describe grace? When someone is gracious to you, how do they act?
 - Kindness; overlooking faults; compassionate; merciful; helping you when you can't help yourself
- There are certain things we know for sure, right? What things do we know for sure? What do we *know* is true? (generate ideas of true, obvious things; for example:)
 - The sun comes up and goes down; grass is green, the sky is blue.
 - We are human beings, men and women.
 - We are here together today at church.
 - We are breathing. We have hair and eyes and hands and feet.
- What do we know to be true about human history? What is one constant in all of human history, over and over again? (Have people always been getting along just fine, without any conflict, peacefully?)
 - Sadly, war and fighting are a constant. People hurt each other in small ways and big ways, every day.
- Now let's be honest with ourselves: Do we know for sure that at one point or another, every one of us has done something we shouldn't have done? Something wrong or hurtful?
 - As the apostle Paul says in Romans 3, "*all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...."

- This is where GRACE comes in. According to Christian faith and teaching, grace is the mercy that God gives us to forgive us, *even though we don't deserve it.*
- If you were in court for a crime you committed, and you said, “yes, I did it, and I’m sorry”— what would the judge do then?
 - Throw you in jail!
 - Or you’d pay a fine, or some other penalty.

God’s grace is like if you were in a court of law, and you plead guilty—and then the judge said, “Because I love you, I forgive you ... and I’ll pay your fine for you.” Amazing, right?

- As the apostle Paul continues in Romans 3, “*all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God—and are justified [that is, declared free] *by God’s grace* as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”
- What is a gift? How does a gift become yours?
 - Something freely given
 - A gift has to be accepted and used. If you leave a gift wrapped up, on the table, is it completely yours?
- When someone gives you a gift, do you ever ask how much it cost? No ... that’s not considered polite 😊
- But in this case, the Bible tells us exactly how much this gift of God’s grace cost: It cost God his only Son.
 - “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son...” (John 3:16)
 - The heart of Christian faith is that God saved us by sending his Son Jesus to die *for* us, so that we could have eternal life—as a free gift, accepted by faith. Grace is not something we earn by being “good.”

During this season of Lent, a time of reflection and repentance, let us pray together in gratitude for God’s amazing grace.

(Silent Prayer) ... Lord, hear our prayers. Now let us pray the Lord’s prayer together:

Lord’s Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, Amen.

Suggested Hymns:

This is My Father's World

It is Well with My Soul

Standing on the Promises

Third Reading: Going to Disney World, a true story by pastor and professor Timothy Paul Jones¹ (edited)

I never dreamed that taking a child to Disney World could be so difficult — or that it could teach me so much about God's outrageous grace.

Our middle daughter had been previously adopted by another family. For one reason or another, whenever our adopted daughter's previous family vacationed at Disney World, they took their biological children with them, but they left her with a family friend. Usually — at least our daughter's mind — this happened because she did something wrong.

By the time we adopted our daughter, she had seen many pictures of Disney World [but she had never been there]. Once I found out about this history, I made plans to take her to Disney World. ...

But the prospect of visiting Disney World somehow produced a stream of downright devilish behavior in our newest adopted daughter. In the month leading up to our trip, she stole food, she lied, she whispered insults to hurt her older sister as deeply as possible — and, the trip got closer, her wrongdoing got worse.

A couple of days before the trip, I pulled our adopted daughter into my lap to talk. "I know what you're going to do," she stated flatly. "You're not going to take me to Disney World, are you?" Her [bad behavior] suddenly started to make sense. She knew she couldn't earn her way to Disney World — she had tried and failed that test before with her previous family — so she was living in that expectation.

¹ <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/the-perfect-illustration-for-gods-outrageous-grace-an-excerpt-from-proof/>

The easiest response would have been, “Yes, if you don’t start behaving better, we won’t take you” — but, by God’s grace, I didn’t say that. Instead, I asked her, “Is this trip something we’re doing as a family?”

She nodded.

“Are you part of this family?” I asked.

She nodded again.

“Then you’re going with us,” I said. “Sure, there may be some consequences to help you remember what’s right and what’s wrong — but you are part of our family, and we are not leaving you behind.”

After the first day of our family time at Disney World, our adopted daughter was a very different child. When bedtime rolled around, I prayed with her, held her, and asked, “So how was your first day at Disney World?”

She closed her eyes and snuggled down with her stuffed unicorn. After a few moments, she opened her eyes slightly. “Daddy,” she said, “I finally got to go to Disney World. But it wasn’t because I was good; it’s because I’m yours.”

It wasn’t because I was good; it’s because I’m yours. That’s the message of grace. God’s grace isn’t a favor you can achieve by being good; it’s the gift you receive by being God’s.

Suggested Hymns:

**Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing
Shall We Gather at the River**

Fourth Reading: Quotes on Grace

Grace means God’s love in action towards people who [deserved] the opposite of love. Grace means God moving heaven and earth to save sinners who could not lift a finger to save themselves. —theologian J.I. Packer

To a Christian, Grace [is], at its simplest, a gift, one that is impossible to earn or deserve but [that is] is freely and graciously given. —Methodist writer John Birch

I am a most noteworthy sinner, but I have cried out to the Lord for grace and mercy, and they have covered me completely. –Christopher Columbus

Man is born broken. He lives by mending. The grace of God is glue. –playwriter Eugene O’Neill

Amazing Grace, written by former slave trader John Newton, 1779

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I’m found
I was blind, but now I see

It was grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come.
It is grace that has brought me safe thus far
And grace will lead me home.

Suggested Hymns:

Blest Be the Tie that Binds
I Need Thee Every Hour

Closing Blessing: (Strike bell as you say the word “Lord”)

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and grant you peace. Amen.

Closing Hymn: Doxology, Reprise