

May 5, 2020 – It's all about GRACE

With Glad Klassen, LLWL

OPENING PRAYER:

We trust in the Lord,
Who is gracious to us.
By faith we are reborn in the Spirit:
New vision,
New ways of thinking,
New power to accomplish good work.

For the Son of God has shined his face on us
With glorious light;
And the Lord has given us the gift of favor.
His promise rests on grace.

Help us, Oh God,
To accept the gift of grace.

Help us, Oh God,
To trust in you.

Help us, Oh God,
To produce the fruit that comes from vibrant faith.

In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen

LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

Light your Christ candle and say the following:

Jesus came to share the good news of God.
He came to share in our joy and sorrows so we may know God more fully.
We light this candle for the good news we share, the good news in hearts,
and the good news that wherever you go God is with you.

SCRIPTURE READING : John 18: 15-18 and 25-27

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

... again they asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

MESSAGE: It's all about GRACE

This message has been prepared by Glad Klassen, LLWL, for the Faith United Milton congregation on May 3, 2020 which is also shared with Palermo United. Any comments you might like to pass along after reading it can be sent to gladfaith@gmail.com. ©Glad Klassen 2020. Provided here with permission.

We are also pleased to be able to offer you Glad's message in video format. Glad has provided this link to expand your worship experience. The link takes you to Youtube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8TWkH5RYV8&feature=youtu.be>

It's a story that you may have heard before, but I hope you won't mind hearing it again.

Throughout much of the 1700s, England was heavily into the slave trade. Thousands upon thousands of men, women and children were taken from African countries and thrown into ships bound for Great Britain, and there, to be sold as slaves. Many of them died on the way, in the belly of those filthy boats with little-to-no food and water.

The captain of one of those ships was a young Royal Navy sailor by the name of John Newton. It's estimated – by his own account – that he transported some 20,000 Africans who became slaves to the wealthy English, or never made it there.

On one of those passages from Africa to England, Newton became very ill and was close to death. He cried out to God for healing, and eventually he DID recover. This experience changed John Newton. He felt shame for what he was doing. He left the slave trade, and later in life became an Anglican clergyman.

He went on to do great things in the name of love. John Newton wanted to see slavery abolished, and he was instrumental in that happening. He influenced many young Christ-followers, including Member of Parliament, William Wilberforce.

Of course, Newton is most known for the beloved hymn that he wrote: "Amazing Grace. I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind, but now I see..." Grace. Amazing Grace.

The gift of God's grace is our focus at Easter time, and although Easter may be over, I'd like us to take a look at part of the story again, and maybe something we don't give much of our attention. But it spoke to me this Easter, and I'd like us to revisit the story. It's about grace, and about Peter and Jesus.

Jesus had just been arrested and taken before the high priest ... John 18 ...

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Skipping ahead to verse 25 ...

... again they asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

This is from John's account. If we look at Luke's telling of the story, we read that Jesus was within earshot of Peter, that he heard Peter deny three times that he knew Jesus. We may not know this for sure, but think about this for a moment: Peter, Jesus' friend – one of the inner circle and someone who loved Jesus and gave up everything to follow him, travelled with him for three years – now, overcome with fear, denies that he even knows Jesus.

And then the shame. Luke also wrote that Peter wept bitterly.
Fear. Shame.

And yet later, sometime after the resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples on the shore while they were out fishing, And then, while sitting with Peter, asked him three times: Do you love me? Peter is shown amazing grace. He gets it. His heart gets it. He is changed. He goes on to do great things in the name of love.

When I was in grade four, I had a friend named Sandra. We were pretty good friends. Sandra didn't have other friends. She was quiet, dressed differently, sometimes didn't have much in her lunch bag. None of that mattered to me. I liked her, and she liked me. We were friends. Then, about halfway through the school year, I found myself part of the cool crowd – the choirs, singing solos, music festival – cool kids. I liked the cool crowd. I liked suddenly being "popular".

One day during lunch hour, I saw one of my new cool friends walk into the classroom where I was sitting, having lunch with Sandra. I jumped up to go talk with her, leaving Sandra alone. The first thing out of my new friend's mouth was: "Is she your friend?" I said, 'no'.

I said, NO! I left the room with my cool friend, and felt sick. I felt so ashamed. I know Sandra heard what I said. I don't remember if it was the next day, or some days later, but I do remember it was lunchtime, and who was there waiting for me, asking me to sit and have lunch at her side? Sandra.

Grace. Such grace I was shown that day.

Maybe it wasn't Jesus I was denying, like Peter. Or maybe it wasn't a crime against humanity, like John Newton. But for that young girl – 50 years ago – the shame was the same, and so was the grace.

Here's the thing about shame. It's never about God. Shame does not originate from God. The Reverend Nadia Bolz-Weber, in her sermon on shame looks back at the Garden of Eden when shame was first introduced – the lies that were planted in the minds of Adam and Eve. When they listened to that voice in their heads (and chose it over the voice of love, the voice of God), they suddenly felt naked and ashamed and afraid. So, they hid from God. But then God came to them and said: "Wait! Who told you that you were naked?"

Now, if God asks: "Who told you that you were naked?" Then obviously the shame they felt didn't come from God. It came from that other voice, the one that filled them with the lies of shame and fear.

Because while Adam and Eve had done something wrong, what they felt wasn't guilt. Guilt didn't make them hide their nakedness. It was shame, which they didn't have when they listened only to God. But having listened to a voice other than God's tell them who they are, shame was able to write its own story in their very minds, trying to erase the story of love written in them by their creator.

This was the story in John Newton's mind. Shame.
In Peter's mind. Shame.
In a young girl's mind. Shame.

But then.... grace. Amazing grace.

That moment when God, in unconditional – "who told you that you were naked" – relentless love, reaches the heart. And the message is clear.

No shame. No fear. Only the grace that tells us who we truly are: God's beloved.

Maybe you haven't committed a crime against humanity, like John Newton (highly unlikely); and maybe you haven't denied Jesus like Peter; or maybe you haven't betrayed a friend, like that cruel, insecure young girl. But I imagine you have your own story, your own moment of shame and fear. Maybe it's come to mind just now.

If your heart didn't know it at the time, I hope it knows it now. Shame is not from God, only love is. And this is GRACE.

Writer Anne Lamott is known for this great quote: "Grace bats last." How awesome is that? All those lies of shame and fear and unworthiness, they're done. They're over. They've held you hostage long enough. Love is up to the plate. GRACE BATS LAST.

May your heart know the relentless grace of God today.

HYMN: Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone) by Chris Tomlin

(link takes you to Youtube)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-4NFvI5U9w&feature=youtu.be>

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us,
that we may continually be given to good works;
through Jesus Christ
who is alive with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God now and for ever.
Amen.

GO NOW IN PEACE: Faith video (link takes you to Youtube)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdUap5fcp4k>