

“United and Living in God’s Grace”

God’s Grace is not a topic of everyday conversation. It is rarely given much thought by any but a few. What is God’s Grace? Why is it important? What does one do to receive God’s Grace?

This “I Am Human” video is a good starting point for those questions. [The “I Am Human” video was shown.] As humans, none of us is perfect. We each have many reasons for feeling unworthy of God’s Love, Grace, and Forgiveness. Nevertheless, God is Faithful and Forgives All. **Because of God’s Grace we can live the New Life – a Life for God.**

What is Grace? It is frequently defined as being **“unmerited favor”** – we don’t deserve it. How frequently do you use the term, “unmerited favor”? Perhaps a better way to think of it is God’s Grace is Totally God’s Gift to us! We did not earn it, nor do we even have to ask for it. Our Divine Parent has already given it to us. **Is it conditional?** No, God does not put any conditions on it. Can we reject it? Yes, we can intentionally refuse to accept or acknowledge God’s Grace and go on and live self-destructive lives, as if God’s Grace has not given us the Invitation to Live the New Life and New Relationship with God and All People.

God’s Grace is not something you or I can control. It functions very differently from the way our Society encourages us to live. **God’s Grace is Selfless – an Expression of God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Agape Love for all of us humans.** Society and the ways of the world encourage us to, instead, be selfish and self-centered – to hold grudges and seek revenge – to take from others to profit for ourselves.

The following story gives us a telling peak at the extraordinary way **God’s Grace is different from our everyday living.** “The little girl who had been good a whole week asked her mother for a favor. ‘I know’ was the answer, ‘that you have been good all this week, but you know you were bad last week.’ In a passionate burst of feeling the little one exclaimed: **‘Oh, mother, you are not one bit like God. When He forgives He doesn’t keep throwing it up afterward.’**” (From Christian Endeavor World as reported in a sermon by Bill Butsko, Forgiveness Brings Joy, 3/12/2010)

God’s Grace and Forgiveness are quite different from what most people think about grace and forgiveness. Our forgiveness of others is often very conditional. We tend to keep the memory of perceived slights on the back burner, so we can make use of them, if it looks like that will help us personally. **However, our Divine Parent does not keep a record of our sins.** For example, the Apostle Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 5:19**, *“Our message is that God was making all human beings His friends through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins, and He has given us the message which tells how He makes them His friends.”*

God’s Grace is important because through it we are Forgiven and shown our Divine Parent’s Great Agape Love for us and all people. We are not required to do anything to earn God’s Grace, Agape Love, and Forgiveness. **The Almighty has declared us worthy of God’s Love and Forgiveness out of God’s Grace.** Instead of demanding a person deserve God’s Love in order to be in a Relationship with our Divine Parent, **God sent the Only Son of God, Jesus Christ, to prove the Truth that God Agape Loves All People and through the Divine’s Grace Invites Everyone into the New Relationship with God and All People and to live the New Life in Jesus Christ.**

Given that through God’s Grace we have all been Forgiven and Invited into the New Relationship and New Life, **“What are we to do?”** Our Scripture Reading is an important resource for answering that question. The Apostle Paul was in prison because of his faith and apostleship – his service to Jesus Christ. In an environment of great hostility from the Jewish authorities and the Roman Government, Paul sought to comfort and counsel Timothy and those to whom he ministered. Paul wrote in **verse 1**, *“From Paul, an*

apostle of Christ Jesus by God's Will, sent to proclaim the promised life which we have in union with Christ Jesus". (PAUSE) Paul continued, "May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord give you grace, mercy, and peace."

The Apostle affirmed God gives us Mercy, Peace, and Grace. **Living in God's Grace, in particular, is a crucial common experience – it Unites us with all the People of God.** Paul indicated the interrelatedness between God's Grace and our Relationship with God in verses 9-10a, *"He saved us and called us to be His Own People, not because of what we have done, but because of His Own Purpose and Grace. He gave us this Grace by means of Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but now it has been revealed to us through the coming of our Savior, Christ Jesus."* It is crucial for us and the whole People of God to remember we are **United by God's Grace.** Indeed, sharing in the Sacrament of Holy Communion on this World Communion Sunday is a demonstration of our being United in God's Grace.

What are we to do as we are United and Living in God's Grace? I found the comments of Alan Brehm instructional. He wrote, "I don't know about you, but part of what discourages me about the Christian faith these days is the way so many people seem to make it something trivial. It seems like there are so many who approach the faith in terms of gimmicks and cheap clichés. They do whatever it takes to 'succeed' at church—even if it means stripping the guts out of the gospel. You may think I'm exaggerating, but one group in Corpus Christi actually gave away an estimated \$2 million worth of prizes on Easter Sunday to get people to come to church. Prizes included bikes, furniture, flat screen TVs, and 16 cars! On Easter Sunday! As appalling as that is, in my opinion" said Brehm, "it is just the most blatant example of what happens every Sunday — selling people a Jesus who will make all their dreams come true. When it seems like the whole world is running to those who take such a 'consumer-friendly approach,' it makes it hard for those of us who try to stay true to the path of the cross to continue to put that message out there, week in and week out. ...". Brehm concluded, "In a very real sense, St. Paul reminds discouraged believers of all times and places that we are not called to 'succeed,' but rather to keep the faith. And" **"God's powerful and loving presence is always there to inspire us as we strive to present a compelling alternative to all the cheap tricks and silly slogans."** ("Faith in a Time of Triviality" by Alan Brehm posted on thewakingdreamer.blogspot.com)

Our being United and Living in Grace is not about focusing on our selfish wants and needs. **Instead, we are called to follow God's and Jesus' Examples of Agape Loving and Sharing the Good News – the Gospel of God's Grace, Forgiveness, Agape Love, Invitation, and Welcome to All People.**

→**We do that by frequently coming together to Worship, Study, Fellowship, and Minister as a "God Is Still Speaking" congregation, which really welcomes All People.**

→**We do that by Loving our Neighbors in Need through the Neighbors in Need Special Mission Offering today.**

→**We do that by Working to help the Hungry through being CROP Hunger Walkers and/or Donors.** You can go to the web link printed in the CROP article on the Welcome Page to Donate. Please write "CROP" on the Red Folder Registration Sheet next to your name to indicate you will be a CROP Hunger Walker.

Give thanks and put your trust in God and Jesus Christ for through God's Grace we are made God's People, who live united in God's Grace! We are given Grace, Agape Love, Forgiveness, the Invitation into the New Life and New Relationship, and God's Welcome into that New Life in Christ and the New Relationship with God and All People. Amen.