

Hello everyone! And welcome to our Wednesday Word devotion for today, April 28, 2021. Thank you so much for tuning in, and for taking this time out of your day to focus on God and focus on your faith.

For today's devotion, I'd love to take some time to think and pray about God's grace. We prayed and meditated on God's mercy a few weeks ago, and since often we pair grace and mercy together, it seemed fitting to talk about the incredible gift that is God's grace. I proposed in my earlier devotion that God's mercy is at the intersection of compassion, justice, and deliverance, that God's mercy is the action of God's love. And today, as we think about grace, here's what I propose. Grace is, at its core, the gift of God. Grace is at the intersection of forgiveness, steadfastness, and love. Where mercy is the action of God's love, grace is the gift of God's love. And we cannot think about that gift of God's love without also considering Jesus.

When we think about Jesus' death and resurrection, not only is it the miracle of new life that was given to us from that empty tomb, from that risen, broken body of Jesus, but it is also the miracle of grace. The miracle of our sins being forgiven because sin has been defeated by God's unending love - not even death could separate God's love (made human in Jesus Christ) from us, God's beloved humanity. So truly, nothing will ever, ever separate us from God's love, and God's forgiveness, nothing we do or don't do will ever make God not love us, and that's the gift of grace. That steadfast love, that nothing will end or separate us from, is the new covenant we celebrate in the sacrament of Holy Communion. We celebrate God's mysterious presence in our world, and tangibly in the bread and wine, and part of that mystery is God's ability to truly love and forgive us no matter what.

So when we think about what God's grace means for us in the day to day, let's think about when we are in need of forgiveness, steadfastness, and love. Sometimes we need to forgive others and it seems absolutely impossible, and we aren't able to forgive someone for an atrocity they did or pain they caused. And that forgiveness is not always up to us - when we aren't able to forgive or show grace for someone else, we can lift it up to God to intervene, to do that work within us and others, within our world as a whole, because only God is truly able to show grace on the levels that are often needed. Sometimes we need steadfastness, a reliability and assurance, a consistency in our lives that may be missing. Especially in this year of pandemic, with routines uprooted and things changing on a nearly daily basis, we've appreciated the need for God's steadfast love and grace more than ever. We feel the deep desire for someone and something who will always show up for us, in truly any situation, and God graciously provides that assurance for us in ways we can barely comprehend. And of course, God's love is a key part of grace. God would not be so gracious, so steadfast, loving, slow to anger and quick to forgive, if God did not love us deeply and call us good from the very beginning of creation. God created us, God loves us in our inmost parts, even the parts that we find hard to love for ourselves, and even when we mess up, God is still there to love us, give us reassurance of that great love, and give us the grace we need to live from day to day.

The last thing I will say about grace is the importance of understanding grace as a gift from God. God's forgiveness and grace is not up to us to earn or bargain for - God's grace is free, it is a

gift made possible in Jesus Christ, and it is simply out of abounding, generous, incomprehensible and steadfast love, that God gives us this holy and life-saving grace. We are free from the power of sin and death by leaning on the gifts so freely given to us by God - grace, mercy, and love. When we feel the pull of sin or death in our lives, we need simply to take a deep breath to feel the Spirit moving, and call on the name of Jesus and the grace and mercy of God to bring us back to the way of new life, of truth, and love. So friends, rest and rejoice in the gift of God's grace, and I pray that we all might be able to be more gracious with one another, as God has first been gracious with us.

Our scripture today is a classic passage on grace, and one of Martin Luther's foundational verses on understanding the gift of grace is in it. I pray you find these words of Paul to the Ephesians to be comforting and worthy of praising God for all God does and has done. This is Ephesians 2:4-10:

*But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us 5 even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— 9 not the result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.*

The Word of the Lord.

And now please join me in prayer:

God of unending love, of grace and mercy, we give you thanks for your generous gift of grace, through your steadfast love and forgiveness. Thank you for the ways your grace fills us and guides us in our lives, to show up for each other and be loving towards you and our neighbors. Help us to be more gracious with others, and to lean on you when we are in need of your healing grace and mercy. We pray all these things and the prayers we carry in our hearts and minds to you, O Lord, in the name of your beloved Son Jesus and united with the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Go in peace, dear friends, have a beautiful rest of your day. Amen.