

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: “10 Seconds and a Few Silver Candlesticks”

SERIES: *Distinct*

SCRIPTURES:

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DATE: *2021 - 4 - 18*

**Credit to Mary Poplin; Philip Yancey; John Ortberg; Bruxy Cavey*

Well good morning, it so great to worship with you. Want to say welcome to all of you in this room and many gathered on-line, at home, tuning in to the live stream.

We are in the second week of a two-week mini-series called “**distinct**”. (**SERIES TITLE SLIDE**) Talking about two words that distinguish us as followers of Jesus. Part of the reason they should be distinct in our lives is because they flow out of the central event of our faith...the Easter story.

One of those words is **forgiveness**. Our Christian faith calls us to a radical level of forgiveness exhibited by Jesus on that cross.

This morning, we are going to talk about what may be the most distinctive characteristic of our Christian faith. This morning the word is **GRACE**.

I am a pretty competitive person. I don't like to lose. When Jenny and I were dating, she can confirm this. If I lose a game, we are playing again right away. And we will play until I win. And I really don't like letting other people win, when they haven't earned it. Then I had 3 kids (**PIC OF JENNY/SHAUN KEAGAN GAME**). Keagan loves strategy board games. He's only 7, but one of his favorite game is a game called Scythe. It's a complicated game to learn at first. But the little guy has learned how to play it. And I realized, part of parenting is letting your children win.

Every once in a while I have to let him win. In a sense, he hasn't earned the victory but he receives all of the benefits of the winner. It's a taste of grace.

Life with God in many ways is God allowing us to receive the benefits of winning even when we haven't fully earned it. It's an astounding concept. Grace confounds and turns the world upside down.

“The world can do almost anything as well as or better than the church. You need not be a Christian to build houses, feed the hungry, heal the sick. There is only one thing the world cannot do. The world cannot offer grace.” (Gordon MacDonald) Or at least not at the level that Jesus followers can and should.

And so this morning let's just talk a little bit about grace. Why it should be distinct in our lives as we follow Jesus. Let's begin by considering three ways...

I. We have received grace.

And we're gonna start with a concept that will blow your mind when it comes to grace.

A. You exist.

That's grace. Thanks for coming this morning, we'll see you all next Sunday. I know it sounds so simple, but I want you to think about this with me for just a few minutes.

We will not fully understand or appreciate grace and be transformed by grace until we recognize that all of life, my life, your life...our existence...is a gift from God.

The Psalmist, contemplating his own existence wrote,

Psalm 139:13-16 - Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out; you formed me in my mother's womb...Body and soul, I am marvelously made! You know me inside and out, you know every bone in my body; You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something. Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth; all the stages of my life were spread out before you...

Luke wrote in the book of Acts...²⁸ **'For in him we live and move and have our being.'**

Human life, existence is a phenomenal thing. A person exists that did not exist before.

I was actually reading recently, it's really amazing, did you know that almost all the cells that make up your body die and are replaced with new cells. Your skin cells, for example, are constantly dying and being replaced. Every 28 days you have completely new set of skin, did you know that?

And what's fascinating to me about this is that even though your cells are constantly dying and being replaced...somehow your body always knows to be making more of you, and not anyone else. You have changed a lot since the day you were born and yet, you are still you!

I know sometimes you probably look at yourself and you think is my existence really that significant. But think about it, there is only one you in the entire universe. Out of the 7 billion people on earth. You are the only one of you. There is a Shaun and it is me and no one else. I did nothing to begin or to deserve this existence. I am here because the Master, chose to make me. That's grace.

If you have never watched the movie Chariots of Fire, you should. I've referenced it before in my sermons. Just an awesome movie. And there's a really great line in the movie. **(IMAGE OF HAROLD ABRAHAMS)** An Olympic sprinter, by the name of Harold Abrahams. One of the fastest men in world. And he's talking to his trainer about his upcoming Olympic race. You can imagine the pressure competing in front of the world, at that level. And he says,

“And now in one hour's time, I will be out there again. I will raise my eyes and look down that corridor; 4 feet wide, with 10 lonely seconds to justify my existence. (to prove my worth as a human). **But will I?”**

But, what if he fails? What if he doesn't win the race? What if he is not able to justify his existence?

So many people in this world trying to justify their existence...with a career, academics, appearance...prove to others that I am valuable and significant.

Understanding grace changes all of that. Because of grace, I don't have to try to justify my existence, because I understand my very life as a gift from God.

Henri Nouwen speaking about human existence says we must understand that...

“...all of life is a pure gift...to acknowledge that all I am and have is given to me as a gift of love...all is grace.” (Prodigal pg. 80)

This week, soak in the gift of grace of your existence...that God has chosen to make you and you need not do anything to justify it. That's the glory of grace in God's Kingdom.

Second,

B. We are saved.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ.... ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God...

Jesus wasn't forced to lay down his life for you. He chose to give his life for you. God thinks you are worth dying for. God thinks you are worth fighting for.

We love stories where someone extends sacrificial love for the benefit of someone else...that sacrificial love is an act of saving grace.

The classic film "Les Miserable"...features the story of Jean Valjean (**IMAGE OF VALJEAN AND BISHOP**). An ex-convict, recently escaped from prison. He wanders the streets but no one will take him. Until finally a kindly old bishop welcomes him into his home, feeds him and allows him to stay the night.

In the middle of night, the bishop hears noises in the dining room. He walks in on Valjean, stealing his precious silverware. Valjean startled, hits the old man and flees into the night.

The next day Valjean is captured and brought back by the authorities back to the old bishop...watch what happens...

1:30-3:35

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOO5qw7EUN8>

“He claimed you gave it to him?” “Yes, yes, I did. And now bring him the candlesticks as well.”

Why does that scene grip us, why does it seem shocking, almost absurd...because it's an image of saving grace?

You and I come to the foot of the cross entangled by sin and failure and brokenness. And Jesus takes it all away for us. **“By his wounds we are healed.”**

That's sacrificial love. That's remarkable grace.

It is by grace that we are saved...

Third...

C. We are changed by grace.

The bishop says to Valjean...

“And don't forget, don't ever forget...what I've done for you...you've promised to become a new man.”

Because of the grace that I am extending to you, you are changed. In fact, in the story...Valjean carries those silver candlesticks with him as a reminder of the transforming power of grace in his life.

Once you recognize life as a gift of grace and that the creator willingly died in your place as a gift of grace...you will be a changed person.

There is perhaps no better example than Paul. Paul was a religious terrorist, killing anyone who followed Jesus. And Jesus looked at Paul and said, he will be my great

witness and missionary to the world. That's grace. And so Paul in his writings talks a lot about being transformed by grace...

Titus 2:11-14 - ¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

One of the reasons people are sometimes skeptical of grace is because, similar to forgiveness they see it as a license to keep on sinning. But Paul says grace isn't a license to sin. Once you truly understand grace it changes how you live and how you want to live.

This is in fact is what **baptism** is all about. It symbolizes the new life we are given once we understand and receive God's grace. You want to witness grace on public display...make sure you're here next Sunday for Youth Sunday Celebration. Five teens from our youth ministry have accepted the grace of Jesus for new life and they are getting baptized into new life. And we get to celebrate them.

Alright as we soak in and recognize the grace we have been given, we are then called as God's people to...

II. Sharing grace with others.

Can I ask you a question? When people outside of the church, think about the church, what do you think the first word they think of is?

Philip Yancey writes, **“Oddly I sometimes find a shortage of grace within the church, an institution founded to proclaim, in Paul’s phrase, ‘the Gospel of grace.’”** (Yancey 296)

And what shame that the group of people who should be most fully aware of the grace we have received have such a hard time sharing that same level of grace with the world.

So I want to suggest two ways that we can extend grace to others. First,

A. Celebrate the existence of the people in your life.

Celebrate people in your life just because they exist, not because they have justified their existence.

I was reading a book recently written by Henri Nouen, a Catholic priest, theologian, and writer. He also spent nearly 20 years, teaching as a professor at academic institutions like Notre Dame, Yale Divinity, Harvard Divinity...until he felt the Lord calling him to work with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities at a place called L’Arche Daybreak in Ontario, Canada.

He recalls many of the challenges he faced in transitioning from some of the highest levels of academia to the residents at Daybreak. And he describes a really awesome encounter he had...

“Soon after I came to Daybreak, Linda, a beautiful young woman with Down’s syndrome, put her arms around me and said: “Welcome.” She does that to every newcomer, and every time she does it, she does it with unreserved conviction and love. But how to receive such an embrace? Linda had never met me. She had no understanding at all of what I had lived before coming to Daybreak. (In other words, she didn’t know I was Henri Nouen). **She had never had**

the chance to encounter my dark side, nor to discover my corners of light. She had never read any of my books, heard me speak, or even had a decent conversation with me.”

Instead, Linda’s hug was an act of grace. See for Linda, she was not hugging Henri because he was the great Henri Nouen. She was just hugging him because he existed. And her mind, all humans by their very existence should be celebrated with random hugs. It was a hug, in one sense childish and naïve, but in another sense profoundly filled with grace.

Nouen, the theologian in that moment, was celebrated not because of his accomplishments, not because he had justified his existence...but just because he exists. (Prodigal pg. 12)

Linda’s hugs, remind me of the Bishops silver candlesticks and ultimately of God’s grace.

Can you think of anyone in your world who needs a hug of random grace? Is there someone in your world who needs to know...they are valuable simply because they exist? How could you celebrate them this week?

And I’d suggest, start with your family (**PIC OF SHAUN & JENNY**). Celebrate your family this week. If you’ve met my wife, you know she is a pretty remarkable woman. Every time I think that I ended up with her in my life. In fact, I know you some of you, you probably look at Jenny and me and say how did a guy like that, end up with a girl like her...call it God’s grace. By God’s grace he put us in this world at the same time and same place. Then he blinded her eyes and her mind into choosing me! And then he gifted us with Landon Michael, and Keagan Riley and appropriately Adalyn Grace. Their existence is God’s grace on my life. And they should know that each and every day.

And if you'll open your eyes, you'll discover that you have been surrounded in your life by people that need celebrated...co-workers, grocery store clerks, mail carriers, and other parents at soccer practice...

I think about this as a Pastor. No joke. I mean this. You all out there, our church. We say this as a staff, we are so lucky, we love this church, we love the people that are part of our group, we love you all, we really do. By God's grace we worship together every week. And we cross paths, we have small talk and we pray for one another, and we cry together and laugh together and next week we want you all to be here so we can celebrate our young people's baptisms together.

The church should actually be the place where grace flows abundantly and we are able to celebrate each other's existence. I hope for you, when you come through these doors, it's just a taste of the grace of human existence and relationship in this world.

This week can I just encourage you, make a few people in your circle of influence, we might call it your circle of grace...feel special, celebrated, not because they did something to justify it, just because they are there and you can do it. That's grace. Wow, what if we all did that this week Five Forks. Can you imagine the impact, the people we could touch?

Oh for a group of people to shower this world and celebrate the lives of all humans with hugs of profound grace. Not because in some way we think they have justified that hug, but simply out of grace.

A second way we can extend grace is to

B. Welcome the marginalized in our world.

This would be one of the most astonishing acts of grace our world could receive. We so often try to separate ourselves from those we deem unacceptable. But Jesus gave this instructions to his followers related to grace in his Kingdom...he said...

Luke 14 - **“When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”**

Philip Yancey tells the true of...

A woman, accompanied by her fiancée went to the Hyatt Hotel in downtown Boston to order what was supposed to be their wedding banquet. They poured over the menu, made selections of china and silver, pointed to the pictures of flower arrangements they liked. They both had expensive tastes and the bill came to \$13,000. After leaving a check for half that amount as a down payment, the couple went home to flip through books of wedding announcements.

The day the announcements were supposed to hit the mailbox, the potential groom got cold feet. “I’m just not sure,” he said, “it’s a big commitment. Let’s think about this a little bit longer.” And he dumped his fiancée. When his angry fiancée returned to the Hyatt to cancel the banquet, the Events Manager could not have been more understanding. “The same thing happened to me, honey,” she said and told the story of her own broken engagement.

But about the refund, she had bad news. “The contract is binding. You’re only entitled to \$1300 back. You have two options, forfeit the rest of the down payment (thousands of dollars) or go ahead with the banquet. I’m sorry, really I am.”

It seemed crazy, but the more the jilted bride thought about it, the more she liked the idea of going ahead with the party. Not a wedding banquet, mind you, but a big blow-out.

Ten years before, the same woman had been living in a homeless shelter. She'd gotten back on her feet, found a good job, set aside a sizable nest egg. Now she had this wild notion of using her savings to treat the down and outs of Boston to a night on the town.

And so it was in June of 1990 the Hyatt Hotel in downtown Boston hosted a party such as it had never seen before. The hostess changed the menu to boneless chicken in honor of the groom, she said. She sent invitations to rescue missions and homeless shelters. That warm summer night people who were used to peeling half-mud pizza off the cardboard, dined instead on chicken cordon bleu. Hyatt waiters in tuxedos served hors d'oeuvres to senior citizens propped up by crutches and aluminum walkers. Bag ladies, vagrants and addicts took one night off from the hard life on the sidewalks outside and instead ate chocolate wedding cake and danced to Big Band melodies late into the night.

Jesus says, "Now if you can see that picture, you'll be starting get some idea of what the Kingdom of God looks like and what I want my church to be about. He said it's like a banquet in my father's house and my father's house is real big and (and church we are the Father's house) and it isn't full yet, so compel everyone to come in taste the grace that is available to them. Go the highways and the byways and find people, and especially find people who thought they were failures, and broken and lost and depressed and scared and a million miles away from God and invite them to come the place where grace just flows.

Folks, this one of the primary reasons the church grew so quickly in the first century is because of the extravagant grace offered to the marginalized, the unacceptable, the down and out.

I just have a hunch, that when we all start looking the same, talking the same, coming from the same place and the same opportunities...I suspect it means we're probably not doing well on this whole grace thing. People feel unwelcome, uncertain

about whether they belong and so they stay away...Not sure if they are allowed, good enough, clean enough. Yep, I know that steps on our toes.

I was just thinking there are a lot people in this world...marginalized, overlooked, unwelcome...who need to be told first and foremost, you are welcome here. This place is safe, and the grace flows.

The church should be the place where nobody's perfect and everyone is welcome...because that what the kingdom of grace looks like.