**Culmore United Methodist Church**

**June 2, 2019**

**Pastors:** *Rev.* *Nelson Neil, Rev. Beth Neil*

**Music:***Dr. Wonhee Kang, All Nations Choir*

**Prelude** *Come, Share the Lord*    **TFWS 2269**

**Welcome and Announcements:**

* **Welcome Visitors**
* **Happy birthday!** Are there any birthdays this week? If so, let us know so we can wish you many happy returns.
* **On Sunday June 9th & 16th**, Pastor Nelson will be Canada fishing for Bass in New Brunswick and spending time with family in Quebec and Ontario. Pastor Nelson will return on June 18th. Pastor Beth will be preaching and will be available to fulfill pastoral care needs.
* **MAP have** had to vacate (for sanitary reasons) their present location early and will set up their ministry at Culmore starting this Thursday. A written proposal is on hand and contains no surprises. I will forward a copy to all members of the leadership team this week.

* **Bible Study** is Wednesday, June 5 at 10:00. We are beginning a new study on Isaiah. *Come for coffee and discussion*.

**Opening Prayer:**

Dear Lord of grace and mercy,

You are our hope, our strength, our light. Where would we be without you? No matter what we’ve done, or haven’t done…no matter how many times we disappoint you, you never give up on us. What a gift of love you give us, unworthy as we are. Here in the love of Christ we stand. *Amen.*

**Passing of the Peace**

**Reflections**:

* Jesus never countenanced evil, but he did stand ready to forgive it. —*Philip Yancey*
* I really only love God as much as the person I love the least*.—Dorothy Day*

These two reflections resonated deeply with me. If you’ve not familiar with Dorothy Day’s story, she was a remarkable person. Her ministry started prior the Great Depression where she founded the Catholic Workers Movement and became an advocate for worker’s rights based on the Gospel principles of “agape love.” When the Great Depression came along, she pioneered “houses of hospitality” where people stricken by hard-times could find shelter, food and Christian Fellowship. Her advocacy was tireless, completely devoted to God and left a legacy which exists today. Day’s ministry brought her front-and center with some people who the classification “unsavoury” might well be an understatement, but this was never a deterrent.

In Dorothy Day we find Philip Yancey’s statement, “Jesus never countenanced evil, but he did stand ready to forgive it.” intersecting with a life of mission; a life spent providing genuine care, genuine concern and genuine agape love to all, regardless of any mitigating factors. All were welcome under Day’s umbrella, the righteous and the sinner alike.

My brothers such is the essence of Grace.

**Gospel:** **John 12: 24-32**

*Jesus said: “****[24]****I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.* ***[25]****The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.* ***[26]****Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.* ***[27]****Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.* ***[28]****Father, glorify your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.”* ***[29]****The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.* ***[30]****Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine****. [31]****Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.* ***[32]******But I, when I am lifted up from the earth****,* ***I will draw all men to myself.****”* ***[33]****He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.*

*The Word of God for the People of God.*

Many people read this passage and don’t quite know what to think about it. Jesus say “unless a kernel falls to the ground and dies it remains only a single seed,” and then he goes on to say that the man who loves his life will lose it but the person who “hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

Come to think of it, it is a little confounding isn’t it.

Pause…

Brothers and sisters, believe it or not, this passage is all about GRACE. Its all about God’s grace to us, given to us through Jesus Christ.

Think about it. Jesus was still alive, still with them. The crowds that followed him were sure that Jesus was of God, some thought that he was the messiah—the anointed one—but that didn’t necessarily equate, at least for them, with being the Son of God. By this time he had revealed is true nature to his closest disciples, but they, neither could take in the totally of Christ’s true identity.

Now here Christ starts talking about having to die to bear fruit and hating one’s life to save it for eternity…. Can you imagine how confused they must have been?

And Jesus must have known that they would be confused. And certainly, the Father knew it because we are told that a voice came from above, Confirming it.

Paul said, “the wages of sin is death.” What the people didn’t appreciate was that Jesus, because of the Cross, would bring all of the sinners of the world, without exception, who came to him back into right relationship with God.

Being “lifted-up” was Jesus code for the cross. And in saying that through his being “lifted-up,” because of the strength of his teaching and ministry and the witness of his apostles, people would be drawn to him. And those who would be drawn to him would be saved.

Pause…

But here’s the thing. Being saved is contingent on acceptance of Christ, and acceptance of Christ calls us into discipleship, which calls us to be faithful to the two ROYAL COMMADNMENTS.

Does anyone remember what they are:

1. “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' \*
2. ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.' \*

Indeed, Christ, upon staying this proclaimed that “all the Law and the Prophets hung on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22: 37-40)

Moreover, in the prayer that all of us are most fond of reciting, Christ teaches us to pray for the extension of grace. Grace from God to us and grace from each of us outward into the world. Listen to the words of Christ. *“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.’* (Mt 6:12)

Pause. And then Christ goes on to say…

[14] For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. [15] But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Mt 6:14)

Pause

Time and time again I hear people say that they are unable to forgive. But we must never forget how closely forgiveness is linked to grace.

Lest we forget, we are all sinners. We are all dependent on God’s grace. Through our faith in Jesus Christ, we are all redeemed by God’s grace.

And in return, what does God ask of us? God asks us to channel his grace outward to others.

So, I ask you, what consequence should we expect when we are unwilling to do the work to extend God’s grace, through forgiveness and Agape love, to others in the same way that Jesus did for us.

So often I’ve heard people say that

“I just can’t forgive,” or

“It’s too painful to forgive,” or

“I’ll never forgive.”

Think about the pain that Christ suffered for us to be under God’s grace, and then play each one of those excuses back through Christ’s voice back to the Father.

Where would we be then?

Let’s reflect on that while we have our responsive reading.

**Responsive Reading:** *(Adapted from Romans 1:2-6)*

The gospel God promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son,

**who as to his human nature was a descendant of David,**

and who through the Spirit was declared with power to be Jesus Christ our Lord, the Son of God..

**Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people to the obedience that comes from faith**.

And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ!

**AMEN.**

**Hymn:** *In Christ Alone***W&S 3105**

**Epistle: Romans 22-26**

***[22]*** *This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,* ***[23]****for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God****, [24]****and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.* ***[25]****God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, \* through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—* ***[26]****he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*

*The Word of God for the People of God.*

**Sermon:** *The Gift of Grace*

I’m often asked why Christ had to die on the cross for human kind to be redeemed. I admit, It took me some time to “get it” as well, and finally, when the penny dropped, I found myself humbled.

The answer comes down to the essential natures of both humans and of God and of the great divide which separates both. This divide could only have been filled by the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ who was both fully human and fully divine.

In Romans St. Paul touches heart of the work of the crucified Christ, that is, that God presented Christ (fully human) as a sacrifice of atonement to demonstrate God’s righteousness because up to that time he had shown forbearance by leaving humanity’s sin unpunished.” (Ro 3:25)

There are two important notions here, the first ***is righteousness*** the second is ***forbearance.*** Both address the essential natures of God and of humanity. These must be understood if we are to fully appreciate the cross in filling the gap between God and humanity.

At the center of this relationship are agreements—covenants—with God which in the time of Moses were passed down to humanity in the form what was known as “The Law ; a code for God’s people which governed practically every aspect of Israelite life. Under the code, righteousness meant living ***in exact conformity*** with what was set out in the covenant. Living righteously meant obeying The Law. Simple, right?

Pause…

Living under “The Law” may have been simple, but it wasn’t easy. It was hard, so hard that no body could do it, and the result was that everyone was living in sin.

Pause…

This was a Theological dilemma for human kind; on one hand was humanity’s inability to live righteously under the law. On the other is God’s need to receive satisfaction for sins committed against his covenant.

Pause…

What to do?

If the gap between God and humanity was to be ridged, it could hardly have been accomplished by any simple human being as according to Jewish law, all sin offerings were to be without defect, and all humans’ were sinners. That left only God as the agent of reconciliation. So, again, what to do? Whatever God was to do, it had to be consistent with God’s essential nature.

* Is it in God’s essential nature to forbear?
* Is it in God’s essential nature to leave committed sins unpunished?
* Is it in God’s essential nature to demand from humans the same justice and righteousness that God observes under His own covenants?

Pause…

the Bible has examples of when God has dealt with human sin according to His essential character. Genesis tells us of the Great Flood in the time of Noah. Also in Genesis we are shown the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. These are reflections of just and righteous treatment which humanity rightly deserves as a consequence of unfaithfulness to covenants with God.

Pause…

Imagine for a moment if God ***had not been forbearing*** and had dealt with human sin as God’s essential nature had demanded? Yikes. Frightening, isn’t it?

Pause...

God had shown forbearance, and in God’s forbearance, God had also left the debt of human sinfulness un-reconciled. Professor Darrel Johnson helps us understand it this way: God is holy, and holiness recoils against what is not holy. In forbearance, God had not acted as God’s own holiness demands.

Pause…

As a result, we should expect God to burn with, as Professor Johnson expresses it, “a strong and settled opposition to all that is evil.” Such is Gods passion and zeal for justice and righteousness which forms God’s essential nature.

It is this essence that insisted on receiving satisfaction for the debt of human sin; the debt for which God had long shown forbearance. Once again, paraphrasing Dr. Johnson, God would not be a just God if he did not crave justice and need satisfaction for the debt of human sinfulness. Such a God would be not only a “care-less” God but arguably, a “love-less” God as well.

So, back to our central question: What was God to do?

(Pause…)

God presented his own and only son, Jesus because **“*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it through him.”*** *(Jn3: 16-17)* Here we come nose to nose with God’s ultimate Grace:

Pause…

God’s grace is freely given, it cannot be bought or sold and we receive it through our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and saviour. But we must be aware of the pitfalls of cheap grace. Cheap grace assumes that grace, freely given, occurs without the need of living in Christ.

Early 20th century theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer differentiated between “cheap” and “costly” grace this way; we encounter costly grace when we discern what God wants and then we do it regardless of personal cost. Remember our earlier passage from John? ***The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life****.*  That’s the difference between cheap grace and costly grace. Bonhoeffer learned this first hand, having been executed in the last days of WWII for plotting against Adolph Hitler.

Pause…

How then should we respond to God’s gift of grace?

* Does grace call us to become more devoted students of Scripture?
* Are we are called to weave prayer into the fabric of our daily lives?
* Maybe we are to take communion often as we can?
* Most importantly, I think, is that we are all called to live lives of God’s grace to us by reflecting to others. We are to do this by living out the two royal commandments, Love of God and Love of neighbour.
  + In the name of grace, we are to offer service to others,
  + In the name of grace, we are to offer charity,
  + And in the Name of grace we are to live out our prayer for forgiveness.

In these ways, we may continuously empower the Holy Spirit’s work in spreading the fragrance of God’s grace throughout the world. AMEN.

**Hymn:** *By Grace We Have Been Saved* **W&S 3110**

**Community Prayer**

**Anthem** *Your Grace* **W&S 3106**

**Doxology**  **UMH 95**

**Communion  W &S 3172** a, b, c

(*see insert)*

**Holy Communion**

Christ invites all of us to this table who love him,

confess our sins, and seek to grow in faith. Let us prepare our hearts and minds to receive his holy sacrament.

**Prayer of Confession:**

**(All) Almighty God, we do not presume to come to this your table, trusting in our own goodness, but in your unfailing mercies.**

**We are not worthy that you receive us, but give your word and we shall be forgiven, through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen***

Hear the good news: Christ died for us while we were yet sinners; that is proof of God’s love toward us. In the name of Christ we are forgiven.

**(All) In the name of Christ we are forgiven!**

**The Great Thanksgiving:**

The Lord be with you

***(All) and also with you***

Lift up your hearts

***(All) We lift them up to the Lord***

Let us give our thanks to the Lord God.

***(All) It is right to give thanks and praise***

In all times and all places, it is right to give thanks to you, our Lord.

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

**Sung Response:** (Leader sings, then we repeat.)

*Holy, Holy, Holy Lord,*

*God of power and might,*

*Heaven and earth are full of your glory*

*Hosanna in the highest.*

*Blessed are those who come in the name of the Lord.*

*Hosanna in the highest.*

On the night in which he gave himself up for us he took the bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said: “*Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”*

When the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks, to you, gave it to his disciples, and said, “*Drink from this all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as your drink it, in remembrance of me.”*

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice in union with Christ’s offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

**Sung Response: *Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.***

All honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and forever.

**Sung Response: *Amen, amen, amen.***

**Blessing of the Elements:** Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here and on these gifts of Bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to the entire world, until Christ comes in final victory. Amen

**Breaking of the Bread and Lifting of the Cup:** Just as there is one loaf, we who are many are one body. Just as we all partake of one loaf, the bread which we share is also a sharing in the body of Christ.

“The cup over which we give thanks is a sharing of the Blood of Christ.”

**Closing Hymn** *Standing on the Promises* **UMH 374**

#### Benediction