

## **Grace in Relationships**

*Luke Bushman, October 29th 2023*

We have been talking about the concept of grace throughout this Fall, reflecting on how marvelous grace can be, and occasionally working through some of the complexities that come with grace. Having grace for others is essential if we want to maintain any relationships, because everyone makes mistakes and hurts other people. For God to have a relationship with the creation they have made, they need to have grace. If God did not have grace for people, then God would have cut humanity off a long time ago. Grace in relationships with others is also when grace often is the most complicated. I find it easier to distance myself from the idea of grace and think of it as simply a spiritual or religious concept, than to apply it to my life. What does grace look like at its best in relationships, and when does grace feel the messiest?

After the service, we are going to celebrate Cornie and Sarah's 60th wedding anniversary during coffee time. In our bulletin on October 15th, we published a list of how long folks have been married. I always find these lists amazing, because the time people have been married feels unfathomable for me. I can't even picture what the world was like 65 years ago when Dennis and Margaret Boldt got married. It is beyond my comprehension. I imagine grace is an important factor in having a healthy, long marriage. Becca and I will have been married for five years this May, and grace is definitely an important part of our relationship. Grace helps us maintain not just our relationship with our spouse or partner- grace helps us maintain all relationships. I am close with each of my siblings, both collectively and individually but it really wasn't always that way. I distinctly remember a simple fight over the TV remote one afternoon,

and without pointing fingers, or naming names, I can say that one sibling was smacked across the side of the head with the remote, and the other was punched in the lower back in retaliation. While we may reminisce fondly about those days, my siblings and I would be foolish to not have grace for what we did to one another in the past. At the time, I saw myself as mistake free, which meant I struggled to have grace for the actions of my siblings. Looking back, I was clearly also to blame. Acknowledging and understanding our own mistakes, is often the first step to being able to have grace for other people's mistakes. When we realize we are flawed and loved, it becomes easier to love those around us, who are also flawed. Grace in marriage means recognizing our faults, and having grace for our partner's faults. Grace is the only way that two flawed people can build a life together.

Does grace have limits though? A few weeks back I talked about Jonah, and the tension that he must have felt between the justice of God, and the grace of God. Grace is messy. Grace often defies what we think is fair. Grace is difficult. I don't think grace is limited, especially not God's grace, BUT I think that grace looks very different in various situations. Grace can have boundaries. Grace doesn't erase consequences for people's actions. Grace isn't grace if it oppresses the victim.

As mentioned before, grace is an important ingredient for marriage, but not all marriages last forever, despite that being the obvious goal when entering into a marriage. While not having grace for one another could lead to divorce, I don't believe that people who get divorced are immediately less gracious. I think there is a gracious, loving, and forgiving way to go about even divorce.

When it comes to relationships I have learned that grace often takes time and space. I once had a falling out with someone, and it really affected me. I have spent a lot of my time in counseling discussing this fall out and trying to process what happened and what I am supposed to do. I felt a lot of anger, which is an emotion that I am very bad at processing, and very good at repressing. I felt so angry and hurt, that I struggled to even speak to this person, or even talk about them. I remember asking in counseling what am I supposed to do? I feel like I am a bad person, but I don't know how to forgive this person and be friends with them again. My counselor then said this quote "I want you to eat, just not from my table". Meaning I want you to have a good life, and to get the love and support you need, but I can't be there. This has been my goal since then, as I internally process my hurt and my anger. Not to become close again, and be all buddy buddy, and not willing to sit in my anger. Reaching a point where I hope for good things for them. Perhaps this is a limited view of grace, but it is where I am at. Grace takes time, and grace is powerful. Maybe one day God's grace will bring about full reconciliation, but for now, I am moving forward trying to release anger, and choose love. This means being gracious to the other- recognizing that they have their own problems and hurts that may have affected our relationship. It means having grace for myself- allowing myself space to process and feel the way I feel. And it means hoping for the grace of God to do something amazing.

All this is to say that I believe grace does not cease to have meaning just because it is accompanied by consequences or new boundaries. To me, grace is choosing love over anger, even in the midst of flaws and wrongdoings. That looks different from person to person and situation to situation. I think we would be very lonely

and bitter if we did not extend grace not just to those we love, but also to the world around us.

If you are an avid reader of our Lectionary (I know I am!) you will notice that the two texts read today were not from this week's Lectionary. I picked these two passages because they interest me and have an impact on my life. The Romans 8 passage was the passage that was read at Becca and I's wedding, and the Exodus passage is one that may challenge how we understand God. I picked these two passages as we wrap up our grace series, because these two passages help me understand the fullness of God's grace.

I have always loved the Romans 8 passage, hence why it was read at our wedding. The notion that nothing can separate us from the love of God, as shown in Jesus is a great example of what the grace of God looks like. No matter what, we will have the love of a friend like Jesus. I feel very lucky to have such an assurance in life, that love will never be far away from me. I feel very similarly when I think about the other covenantal relationships in my life. Relationships that with the help of grace will exist forever- my family, my friends, and my spouse will always be by my side. Having a similar promise from our creator inspires me to pursue similar grace in my own life. This passage about unbreakable love has always been one of my favorites.

The passage in Exodus, appears right after Israel betrays God and begins worshiping a Golden Calf instead. It follows a conversation between Moses and God, where Moses seems to talk God out of destroying the Israelites. I have primarily heard this passage used to provoke theological debate. Can humans change God's mind? If God is all knowing how is that possible? Was God's original impulse wrong? I do not

plan on answering those questions, or trying to, but I would rather look at why the author of Exodus chose to tell the story in this way. Including a dialogue where Moses pleads with God, and God listens, portrays a God who has grace. A God who loves others, hears others, and extends mercy to others. I think the writer wanted to communicate that in the midst of this intense situation, full of messy mistakes and betrayals, that God is someone who the people could be in relationship with. God is a relational God, and for God to be in relationship with us, means God has to have grace. Grace is the foundation for our relationships. All of our relationships need to have a measure of grace, and throughout the whole Bible whether it is in Exodus, or in Romans, we see that God is an example of showing grace to others.