

Beloved Grace

(sermon # 4 in the Beloved series)

John 3:14-21, Ephesians 2:1-10

May the words of my mouth and the meditations in our hearts be acceptable and suitable in your sight, oh Lord, our rock, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

This morning's sermon title is Beloved Grace. Our lessons and the gospel really all flow together quite well today. In briefly looking at the texts at the beginning of the Lenten season, I rather quickly chose a different title for today's sermon. The original title was to be Beloved Light. To focus on Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

Not that that was a bad or wrong title, but the more I

read and studied and searched the scriptures, the word grace would not let me go. Often, as that word grace does not let us go. Grace abounds throughout our teachings about Jesus. Here, though, is a thought.

What about grace in the Old Testament? It is there.

It can be found. In fact, in most cases in the Old Testament, the grace of God is evident and even abundant! Often, we think of the Old Testament in terms of law. New Testament, gospel, or good news.

Old Testament, law or commandment.

Our Old Testament last week was in fact just that, Moses bringing down the 10 Commandments or Laws given to him by God on Mt. Sinai. Today though, Jesus refers directly to our Old Testament reading as he speaks to the Jewish leader, Nicodemus that "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

The bronze serpent, in the Old Testament that Jesus speaks of, was sent by God to save the people.

Now, there is a whole lot of grace from God in this particular story. The Israelites, well, what is there to say about the Israelites? They complain. A lot. The irony though and really how anyone can read this story and not see some irony here or at least a little humor in it, is beyond me. The Israelites are quite bold in their complaining, "There is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." Well, didn't they just say there was no food? Yet they detest the food? God provided them with food, they just didn't like the food God provided. God's grace was not in the form of a steak and lobster dinner, but God gave them food to eat.

God showed grace to a rather grumpy and unthankful bunch of people. He saved the people, and even though

God himself sent those poisonous snakes, he also provided them with a way to live and be saved. Once the people stopped thinking about all they did not have and focused on the one and only thing that could save them, they lived. Beloved grace from God in the form of a bronze serpent, yet grace, for God's beloved people just the same.

Undeserving, unworthy, and in no way ever earned, Beloved Grace freely given by God is what Jesus' life is all about.

God as we know sent this gift of grace in the flesh,
divine and human to show love and forgiveness to a
sinful world.

"For it is by grace that you have been saved through
faith and this not of your own doing but a gift from
God." The very reason we even have faith at all, is
because God in his great love for us sent Jesus to us so
that we might believe. So that we might live and know
this love and grace through the life, death and
resurrection of Jesus. For God so loved the world.

Where is your focus?

Because, I am sure, for any of us who may have been with Moses and the Israelites that day somewhere on their journey between Mount Hor and the land of Edom, I am sure if we were being ravaged by a bunch of snakes and in order to not die, we had to focus on the bronze serpent, you better believe we would not take our eyes off of that bronze statue.

So just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the son of man be lifted up.

Beloved Grace.

The son of man in the form of creator, divine one, human, and grace.

Beloved of God, in all his goodness and glory showers us with gifts beyond our wildest hopes and dreams.

Not because of what we have done. Not because we have earned it or deserve it. Because of God's great love for us, we have been given life. In our Lenten journeys, we focus on the cross. We focus on Jesus.

Not because we will receive a reward, not because there is something in it for us. We keep our eyes on the cross and what happened there because that is where life is found. That is where we learn to follow the one who gives us life. That is where we learn about Beloved Grace and how to share and freely give that grace to all in our midst in this life.

Even surrounded by struggles and longings and heartaches and pain in this life we can look to the cross and know without a doubt that what happened there, happened all because of this deep Beloved Grace found only there. On a wooden cross. On a hill between 2 thieves as the crowd watched in doubt and some yelled, "Crucify Him!" As the sky grew dark and the earth shook. There a very much Beloved Grace was given, poured out, shed and broken. Thanks be to God for such a Beloved Grace. Amen