

Sixth Sunday of Easter – 2025

Acts 16:9-15

Revelation 21:9-14, 21-27

John 16:23-33

Are you growing in your understanding of the central aspects of life as you mature? What might those central aspects of life be? If you were to distill this hustle and bustle that we all go through, if you were to condense the wild and woolly nature of life to just a handful of variables, essential variables, what would they be? Love; is love a central aspect of life? Is your understanding of and appreciation for love increasing? Christianity teaches love at its core. Are you growing in love? Mercy; is your hands-on awareness of the nature of mercy growing as you age? Personal industry; is your understanding of how to be engaged in work, how to cultivate a strong work ethic, growing in your mind? I would suggest to you that truly understanding all of these things lead to a clearer picture of the Lord who rules heaven and earth, and by extension, lead to a peaceful, content, and happy heart. Honesty, cultivating truth in every sector of your life – are you growing? Faith; are there quadrants of your life where faith is an unwelcome guest? Are there some places where you attempt to prevent God from taking a seat?

Love, mercy, personal industry, truthfulness, faith – those are essential components of your life, are they not? As you mature, are you learning more about these things? Do you believe that you have exhausted their depth? Some of us are slow learners. Some of us are book learners. Some of us are life learners. Some of us don't know half the things that our phones can do. Some of us don't care. Grace; now there's a big one. Grace; do you understand it? Grace; do you care? Love and grace, sacrifice and grace, mercy and grace, truth and grace, faith and grace – are you growing? God's grace is all around you. Do you see it? Has God's grace changed you, enlarged your heart, clarified your relations to others, sharpened your eyes to see this world aright?

Lydia is a hero of mine. Not because she did anything in particular, but because she was a woman of grace. Lydia was likely wealthy. She was a Gentile, a woman who had embraced some aspects of Judaism, but she was not a full convert. Lydia is described by Luke as being “a worshiper of God.” St. Paul is preaching in Philippi (N.E. Greece). St. Paul was a powerful preacher. St. Paul put the pieces of Scripture together with masterful skill. St. Paul painted the picture of Christ crucified, Christ the champion of the cross, Christ the embodiment of grace and love and truth, Christ the victor over sin and death. Lydia listened. With other women, Lydia listened. And grace engulfed Lydia.

Not too long ago, a deranged man bombed a fertility clinic in Palm Springs. This man subscribed to a vain philosophy called “mortalism.” Mortalists can be loosely defined as “anti-natalists” (they don't want anyone to be born). Mortalists want the human race to end because life is inherently bad. The statement that caught my attention, the statement by the nihilist individual who bombed the fertility clinic was this one: “I did not give my consent to being born.” The statement is true. It is a twisted formulation of a sublime divine gift. None of us contributed to our being born. And yet here we are. For a Christian, life is inherently good. You have received a remarkable gift. Life is a divine favor, a divine extension of what properly belongs to God alone. Life and grace are the bountiful expressions of a giving God. Every

breath you take is grace. Life was afforded to you as a gift of love. Do you understand it? Do you embrace it? Do you thank God for it?

The bible is clear about grace. When you were dead in trespasses and sin, God made you alive in Christ – by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:5). God is rich in mercy. God is overflowing with love for you, genuine love, self-giving love. God loved the world in this way, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but will have eternal life (John 3:16). You didn't ask for Christ to die for you, did you? You didn't give your consent for the Father to send His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, did you? (Galatians 4:4-5). God did that entirely on His own, didn't He? Our Father took the initiative. Our Father claimed us by the blood of His Son. You didn't participate in that at all, did you? But you received it; you received the gift, you received the mercy, the love, in time, truly and deeply and thoroughly received it. You heard the Gospel, and you believe. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17).

Lydia is a woman of grace, a hero of grace. Listen to how Luke describes the grace of God as St. Paul proclaimed Christ to Lydia. "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul" (Acts 16:14). That's the English Standard Version. Here's the New International Version: "The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message." Who took the initiative? Who was active to bring about faith in the heart of His daughter? Grace saturates every aspect of Christianity. Grace is delivered to you through God's appointed means – the Word and the sacraments. Grace is the ancient reality of a crucified Messiah and it is the contemporary reality of the Word which penetrates your heart. If you want to learn more about the world in which you live then grace is where to begin. When grace is in your eyes, hope is in your heart.

To forgive as you have been forgiven is grace in action. To be determined *not* to forgive someone who has sinned against you is to act in a way that is contrary to Christ's cross, contrary to your faith, contrary to the very thing that is going to endure beyond this world. And yet, that is what you do. Each of us is judgmental in our own way. Each of us holds others to standards we ourselves could never achieve. None of you need "just a bit" of grace. None of you is loved by God by virtue of your outstanding character. You are loved because God is your Father, because Jesus is your brother, because you were created in His image. You sin and you are forgiven. You are forgiven not because you make yourself forgivable, but because the Creator of heaven and earth is merciful and good and loving and because the Son of God paid the price your sin demands. He died. Jesus atoned for your sin. The price is paid and you didn't pay it. The price was paid for you. Love paid it; love gives you the fruit of that sacrifice in His body and blood.

Let me bring you into my world, just for a minute. I want people to come to the Divine Service. I desire this not for any other reason than I know what goes on here, who is at work here, how we profit immensely from what God does in this unique time. Some don't come all that often. It's sad. It puts faith at risk, it diminishes their spiritual strength, it shows a latent disregard for what Christ has done and the extent of their need. Is God's grace for them? Oh, absolutely! Not a half-measure, not a conditional provision, not a half-hearted love does God give them – it's full, abundant. A cheerful Giver is our God and I am His servant. Do we learn? Are we aware of the truth that my response to God's grace doesn't justify me. But God nonetheless calls me to

respond to His grace. How? By loving my neighbor. By receiving what He wills to give to me. By devoting my time and energy to His kingdom. By serving others as Christ has served me. By distancing myself from what is profane and dark and selfish. By learning His Word. By trusting His promises.

St. Peter wrote this: “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). You don’t need more salvation than you already have but you can grow in grace. Forgiveness, compassion, serving others, giving thanks in all circumstances, seeing and helping the bereaved and the forgotten and the lonely. Grow in grace, dear saints of Christ the King. Enrich your lives with the beauty that enriched Lydia of Thyatira. That very day, Lydia and her whole household were baptized and she became a patroness of Christ’s church. Grow in grace, dear saints of Christ the King. The Lord is with you. It is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9).