

What is grace? Grace is none other than God's undeserved love for His people. It's undeserved in the sense that we don't deserve His love or his righteousness. As sinners we don't deserve God's love, but love is who God is. God is love. And there's nothing we can do to earn His love.

God's grace is a free gift. His gift is for all His people of all times and in all places. It was for those in the Old Testament who placed their trust in the long-promised Messiah, who was to come, as it was for Abraham.

It has been for those of the New Testament church who have placed their trust in the Messiah who has come, and who will come again, as it is for you and for me.

God's grace extended to Abraham and his descendants, which would be more numerous than the sands on the seashore. The promise of the free gift is for all who believe in Jesus Christ and confess Him as their Savior and Lord.

In Genesis 12, the Lord called Abram to leave his home country for a land he didn't know. Abram was to pack up and move out at the young age of 75!

How would you react if you were told to move to a place far away—not familiar to you? Maybe you or someone you know may be facing this situation in the near future. Such a move would truly mark a major turning point in your life.

Would you resist it, or would you embrace it? Would such a move be in your best interest?

Yet the Lord called Abram to uproot his entire family, and take all his possessions and all his livestock, and make the long trek to a foreign land. He promised to make Abram a great nation, and in him all the families of the earth would be blessed by the Lord God.

He didn't question God; rather, he moved his family to the land of Canaan. Abram trusted in God, and God counted this to Abram as righteousness. God considered Abram righteous, changing his name to Abraham, for he would become the father of many people.

The patriarch-to-be trusted in the Lord. He had faith in God. On account of his faith in God, he was the blessed recipient of the promise.

What Abraham received was the Gospel. The Gospel is full of promises and blessings. These things don't come from the Law; the Law only brings threats and curses. As the blessed Apostle St. Paul writes in the Epistle verses 13-17:

Verses 13-17: **“For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring- not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all...**

...as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"- in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.”

The curse is for those who don't believe the promise. The curse is borne of the Law, and the Law shows us our sin.

On this Second Sunday after Pentecost, it's imperative that we examine just what sin is. Sin is our acting contrary to God's will and His Word. Sin is our doing what God forbids and our not doing what He commands.

God has given us His Ten Commandments; yet we transgress them daily, even if it's the least of the Commandments.

Sin is our operating outside of God's grace. It's our rejecting the gifts our Lord offers in His Means of Grace.

Sin is our not wanting the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation Christ has won for you on the cross and now gives you in His Word and Sacraments. Sin is not only our rejection of the gifts but of the Giver of the gifts, God Himself.

Sin is our acting outside the faith the Holy Spirit seeks to work in us and our acting out of our natural hatred for God. Sin is our not trusting in God's promises. Sin is our doubting God's Word and His will for us.

As Luther writes about the First Commandment, **What Does This Mean.** We do not fear, love, and trust in God above all things, but we give in to the temptations of the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature.

We have set ourselves up against the God who came down from heaven.

He, who has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts and has put down the mighty from their thrones, has brought us down to our knees, that we would repent of our sins, for without repentance and faith we are dead in our trespasses and sins.

Even Abraham didn't always trust God's promises. Impatient from waiting for God's promise of an heir and at his wife's insistence, he had sexual relations with her servant, who bore Ishmael, of whom God said was not the promised heir.

Abraham and Sarah would later have Isaac in their old age, but Abraham, grew impatient with God's promise, as do we today.

We don't trust in His promises in the Gospel, and we break His Commandments, the Law. This is sin, and the result of sin is the curse of eternal condemnation, for, as St. Paul writes later in Romans, "For the wages of sin is death."

Sin means that we must repent. We must be born again. **John 3:5:** Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

This rebirth has begun; it began over there [pointing to baptismal font]. This rebirth is of water and of the Holy Spirit, as our Lord tells us in the Holy Gospel appointed for today.

As the water was applied with the Word of God upon your forehead, the Holy Spirit began to work in you saving faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

This faith is a gift from God, and it's His work to bring you to and keep you in this faith, as He calls you by the Gospel, enlightens you with His gifts, sanctifies and keeps you in the true faith.

Through these Means of Grace, our Lord lifts us up and gives us His gifts, strengthening our faith so that we may look forward to the Last Day, when our Lord's promises will be brought to their completion.

On that Day we will be in the Kingdom of Glory (the saints in heaven—the Church Triumphant) for all eternity. As St. Paul also says in **Romans 6:23b** "The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The Lord sustains us each and every day. We are the blessed recipients of God's gifts, for these are ours by grace, His undeserved love for us, which He gives only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in us.

Like the Pharisees, the world is appalled at a God who would associate with sinners – with those they despise, those they consider unredeemable, those they would not give the time of day. “Why does your teacher eat ...” with such people?

While the world may despise you (and the Teacher you follow) – the Lord Jesus is not ashamed to associate with you.

In Today’s gospel, the voice of the Living Christ called Matthew away from a life of greed and fraud to “follow me” – to live a new life, a life of faith, that treasures the grace and mercy of God which flows through His Son, Jesus Christ.

That same voice of the Living Christ has called you by His Word – washing you in His Holy Baptism – clothing you with His righteousness – that you may be His disciple, following Him in the new life of faith.

He comes and reclines at Table with you – that your hunger and thirst for peace with God might be satisfied by His Body and Blood.

Here, in the Sacrament of the Altar, the sacrifice offered to God on the cross – now bestows on you the benefits of that sacrifice – the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.

Jesus Christ crucified and risen for you today, and tomorrow and every day. Live each day with faith in the Lord, bearing your crosses, as St. Paul writes in Romans; you’re your body in a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Romans 12:2 “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

“For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” That is why Jesus has come – and comes even today – for sinners. Are you a sinner – weak, ill, despised by the world, unworthy of God’s love and mercy? Christ has come “for you.”

His sacrifice is for your new and everlasting life. His Table is set for you – to satisfy your guilty conscience, to strengthen your love for your fellow man, to anchor your faith in God’s grace. Come, recline with Jesus at the Table He has prepared for you.

Come and rest in His healing forgiveness – eradicating the fear of death, and incubating joy in His salvation. Come and sit with Jesus, living in the mercy of your Savior, who calls you to “follow me.” Amen.