Ash Wednesday
Rolling Meadows - 1970

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Luke 23: 39-43 ONE OF THE CRIMINALS WHO WERE HANGED RAILED AT HIM, SAYING, "ARE YOU NOT THE CHRIST? SAVE YOURSELF AND US!" BUT THE OTHER REBUKED HIM, SAYING, "DO YOU NOT FEAR GOD, SINCE YOU ARE UNDER THE SAME SENTENCE OF CONDEMNATION? AND WE INDEED JUSTLY, FOR WE ARE RECEIVING THE DUE REWARD OF OUR DEEDS; BUT THIS MAN HAS DONE NOTHING WRONG." AND HE SAID, "JESUS, REMEMBER ME WHEN YOU COME IN YOUR KINGLY POWER." AND HE SAID TO HIM, "TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE."

Hallmarks

SAVED BY GRACE — ALONE! This is one of the three great foundation stones of the Christian religion: SCRIPTURE ALONG, FAITH ALONE, GRACE ALONE.

Grace - God's grace - God's love for the unlovely. This is the great, resounding, unbelievable theme that runs like a golden thread throughout all of Scripture.

Grace alone! - God's undeserved mercy for us poor, damned sinners! There is no hope without this. There is no salvation without this. There is no life without this. We need to nail it down - once and for all - Ephesians 2: 8,9: FOR BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED THROUGH FAITH; AND THIS IS NOT YOUR OWN DOING, IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD — NOT BECAUSE OF WORKS, LEST ANY MAN SHOULD BOAST!

your own will no one can about it!

efforts

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Grace alone! This penitent criminal on the Cross is the primary example of God's Compassion - God's Grace! Turning His head to the Suffering Savior, he said, "LORD, REMEMBER ME." Remember him for what? Remember him for how good and noble he was and for all the fine things he did in his life? He had nothing to boast about. He could claim nothing like that. He could only say, "LORD, REMEMBER ME." You don't have to read very far between the lines to know what he meant: "Lord, I am nothing. I can claim nothing. I deserve nothing. I can only ask You to REMEMBER ME - to have MERCY ON ME." That is what we call REPENTANCE! *

God's love

He was a criminal!

Hard core! Today - long hair

-Garbage- all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags!

Grace alone! Pick up your Bible and you will find it on almost every page. Let me give you a few examples. There is Jacob (even his name means Mr. Tricky)! He deceived his father and cheated his brother out of the birthright. As a consequence he was forced to run for his life. The GRACE OF GOD delivered Him. After 21 years he came back to his homeland with the cry on his lips: "LORD, I AM NOT WORTHY OF ALL THE MERCY AND OF ALL THE TRUTH WHICH THOU HAST GIVEN UNTO THY SERVANT.

There is David. Listen to how he prays: "I KNOW MY TRANSGRESSIONS, AND MY SIN IS EVER BEFORE ME. AGAINST THEE, THEE ONLY, HAVE I SINNED, AND DONE THAT WHICH IS EVIL IS THY SIGHT. And his pastor, Nathon, is the one to bring him the message of Grace: "THE LORD HATH PUT AWAY YOUR SIN."

There is filthy- ~~foul-mouthed~~ Isaiah. He sees the Thrice Holy God in a vision, the angels who covered their faces and he cried, "I AM A MAN OF UNCLEAN LIPS." "WOE IS ME." In that moment Grace came to him!

There is foul-mouthed Peter. After the miracle of Great Draft of Fishes he buried his head in the sandy beach and cried: "DEPART FROM ME, FOR I AM A SINFUL MAN, O LORD. Grace was there — Even so, his filthy tongue never left him. In the Courtyard of Caiaphas, when the chips were down he cursed and he swere. But always there was GOD'S GRACE. Jesus turned and looked at Peter - and HE WENT OUT AND WEPT BITTERLY.

There is the sinful woman. When all of her accusers left, Jesus said to her, "HAS NO ONE CONDEMNED YOU?" She answered, "No on, Lord." He said to her, "NEITHER DO I CONDEMN YOU.? That is God's Grace in action.

There is the Publican in the Temple. The Pharisee bragging about all his garbage! He would not even so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast say, "GOD BE MERCIFUL TO ME, A SINNER." And God's mercy - God's Grace came down upon him. "THIS MAN WENT DOWN TO HIS HOUSE JUSTIFIED."

There is the Prodigal Son. He came, dragging himself home, with the like a whipped puppy confession: "FATHER I HAVE SINNED AGAINST HEAVEN AND IN THY SIGHT, AND AM NOT MORE WORTHY TO BE CALLED YOUR SON." Once more Grace came: "THIS MY SON WAS DEAD, AND IS ALIVE AGAIN; HE WAS LOST, AND IS FOUND."

There is Paul - BREATHENG OUT THREATENINGS AND SLAUGHTER AGAINST THE CHRISTIANS" - until He confronted Christ on the Damascus Road. He came face to face with God's Grace. From that moment on he had only one thing to say: THIS IS A FAITHFUL SAYING, AND WORTHY OF ALL ACCEPTATION, THAT JESUS CRIST CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNER, OF WHOM I AM CHIEF.

People of God

You can keep going down the list. All the truly great men of God have been recipients of that AMAZING GRACE! There is the disolute youth, Augustine, who was praying, Lord, save me, but not yet! Then came that memment when he came head-on with the Grace of God. From that moment on he became one of the greatest herlads of the Gospel the church has ever known.

There was Luther - whose Reformation under this Grace of God has turned the world upside down for more than 350 years. There was ~~John Calvin~~ Charles Wesley who wrote the great words of our Sermon hymn: JESUS LOVER OF MY SOUL —

> Plenteous grace with Thee is found,
> Grace to cover all my sin.
> Let the healing streams abound;
> Make and keep me pure within.
> Thou of life the Fountain art,
> Freely let me take of Thee;
> Spring Thou up within my heart,
> Rise to all eternity.

That brings us back to this Criminal on the Cross - next to Jesus. Grace abounds! One moment he is a condemned criminal - the next a saved sinner! One minute hanging from the Cross - the next residing in Paradise. Talk about RAGS TO RICHES. Here you have it!

It is there for you and me too. It is there when we come humbly to say and confess: LORD, REMEMBER ME..... I AM A POOR, CONDENMED SINNER..... I DESERVE NOTHING BUT YOUR WRATH AND PUNISHMENT!

But thanks be to God! He - Jesus Christ - my Lord and Savior - He HAS REDEEMED ME, A LOST AND CONDENMED CREATURE, PURCHASE AND WON ME FROM ALL SINS, FROM DEATH AND THE POWER OF THE DEVIL, NOT WITH GOLD OR SILVER, BUT WITH HIS HOLY, PRECESIOUS BLOOD, AND WITH HIS INNOCENT SUFFERING AND DEATH.

God's love alone knows why. But He did it. That's GRACE. And I too can hear his Voice: TRULY I SAY TO YOU, TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE. God grant it. Amen.