

## Our Identity in Grace

Luke 4:21-32, Jer 1, Ps 71, 1 Cor 14:12-25

**Opening Prayer-** Lord God, Heavenly Father, we know that your word comes to us to bear fruit in our lives. Work in our hearts and minds to open them to your Word of Love and Redemption and may it take root in our lives to live for your Glory. May we embrace your grace of your Son and live in the power of your Holy Spirit. We pray this in the Holy name of Jesus our Saviour. Amen.

**Introduction-** Good morning, it is wonderful to see you all and to worship the Living God with you. Fawn also wants to say “Hi” and that she loves and misses you all. I believe she is on the livestream, so, on the count of 3, everyone say Hi to Fawn! Thank you. Today, you all are my Gospel illustration. I have been a Deacon amongst the Anglican Churches in Northern Colorado for 10 years and a priest for just under a year. In that time, I have seen our Churches grow and decline. Clergy come and they go. But we have been on a journey of Grace, and I see it reflected in the hearts and lives of the people in this Church. James 1 says ***“Count it all joy, brothers and sisters when you meet trials of various kinds, 3for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.”*** Based on the last 7 years, we have been blessed with an abundance of joy and steadfastness. Though I would not wish the different trials that many of us went through on anyone, they have worked on us, refined us as through a fire. We are tender now in areas that were hard, we have seen the value of grace and mercy and it has shaped who we are, hopefully conforming us more to the image of Christ. This process of sanctification though, requires we stay alert to an over focus on self, on family and friends, that comes before a relationship with and a reliance on Jesus Christ. That relationship can only come through grace. The grace of God molds us and shapes us to become the servants useful to our Lord and dedicated to His Glory. Our trials remind us that we cannot navigate this life in our own power, but that we depend on God for everything. I’ve titled this message, **Our Identity in Grace**, and I have 3 points that start with the letter G. *1. Grace is central to the Gospel, 2. Grounding our Identity in Grace and 3<sup>rd</sup>, Going out in Grace to the World.* Our Gospel today shows us a picture of people who were relying on themselves and their identity to a family instead of to a grace filled relationship with God. Our Old Testament reading gives us a clear picture of the Biblical identity of a servant of God. And our Psalm and New Testament readings point us to an application of how this identity in Grace should work itself out in our lives. Let us open God’s Word and partake of the spiritual food found there.

**I. Grace is Central to the Gospel-** We start with the Gospel today in Luke 4. V21 says, ***“And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”*** Of course,

this means we must go earlier to find out what that scripture says. Jesus is quoting the messianic passage of Isaiah 61 in Luke 4:18-19, ***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*** This is a clear message of Grace. Jesus tells us that God is reaching out in love to redeem and set free those who are in bondage to sin and death, which means everyone. The offer is universal but its acceptance is not. Vs 22 in the ESV points out that these friends and neighbors of Jesus from Nazareth marveled at His gracious words. But NT Wright makes the point that gracious here does not mean that Jesus was well spoken, though I am sure he was, but that Jesus was speaking words of grace to them. They had heard of Jesus being a mighty speaker in other place, and that he had done wonderful, powerful signs. Here in Nazareth, Jesus has claimed the mantle of Messiah in their hearing, but then He starts speaking of grace! What need did they have of grace, the needed judgment over their oppressors and a leader who would set them free! Wasn’t this Joseph’s son? Where does he get off claiming to be a messiah of grace! And there you have it. Though they had spent 30 years with Jesus, their identity was defined by being children of Abraham and the law. In that identity, they could only see miraculous signs as a precursor to revolution and rebellion as they had seen in the time of the Maccabees. There they threw off the chains of oppression to become a small, inconsequential nation that was easily conquered again a few years later. The fact that Jesus does no great works among them is a mercy to them as they would have misinterpreted those acts along this nationalistic identity that leads them further away from a relationship with God. We see this same lostness throughout our society. It seems like we have set ourselves into armed camps, ready to do battle, sometimes with words, but sometimes with actual violence. “Fight fire with fire” is a term for civil war, not revival. Many of us have seen this same scene play out in Church, where disputes result in tremendous pain and loss and grace is no where to be found. That is the key, building an identity based on our love and relationship with our Redeemer and the Grace he brought with him. Jesus warns the people in vs24-27 of times in the past where prophets of God were sent to Israel, yet found little faith among the descendants of Jacob and instead, Gentiles were blessed. This infuriates His listeners. Jesus will also find faith in the Roman Centurion and the Syro-Phoenician woman who had been bleeding for 12 years, but He will not find it in Nazareth. Can we who, like Israel, have such a heritage of faith, afford to miss this message? Do we place our trust in ourselves, our family, our talents, our traditions, or do we cling to our identity in Jesus as we would a lifeboat in a stormy ocean? Let us examine ourselves to assure we walk in grace, faith and relationship with our Redeemer and King.

**II. Grounding our Identity in Grace-** Our Old Testament reading gives us an example of Biblical Identity. In Jer 1, we see the prophet God has chosen. ***“4 Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 5 “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” 6 Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” 7 But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord.”*** The first rule of Identity is that God chooses us. God acts, and we are chosen. This is a familiar model. We see the Prophet is called and he suggests someone else is a better choice. We see the same thing when God calls Moses, Isaiah, Elijah and even when he calls the Apostle Paul. But God reminds each one that they will not walk in their own power, but in the power of God, working through them. ***“My grace is sufficient for thee”*** God reminds Paul and reminds us. We are chosen. We are image bearers of God from before we were born. Last week was Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, so please bear with me a small aside. Here and throughout the Bible it makes clear that a person with a soul exists in the womb. People who will yell “Follow the science” about other issues seem content to hide behind language and speak of a fetus or a choice, but never a child. But science makes clear this is a human baby from conception. It cannot develop anything else. Even before it can possibly live on it’s own, it has a heart and brain and organs and, as this passage makes clear, a soul. As a people of grace with a Christian identity, we must defend life in all it’s vulnerability: in the womb, in illness, in disability, and near the end of life. And for the victims of the lie our culture has spread for over 50 years, we must act with grace and not judgment if we are to follow in the footsteps of our Saviour. If our identity is grounded in our relationship with Jesus, we recognize him as the Lord of Life and we do not put ourselves in his place in life decisions. I do understand that there are times when a loved one has asked us to follow their wishes in terms of artificially prolonging life, a responsibility that should be covered in prayer. But back to our scriptures. God chooses us, giving us the grace to live for Him and promising to act through us, in his power. Does that make us some sort of a Christian robot, with no choice or will in the matter? Not at all. God’s Sovereign grace and our free will can cooperate in our sanctification. Will we have crowns to lay at the feet of Jesus on the last day or will we be saved as through a fire? The answer lies in our response to the gift of Grace in Christ Jesus. That brings me to our 3<sup>rd</sup> point, and our Psalm and New Testament reading.

**Going out in Grace to the World-** Our Psalm today is one we quote in our Compline service. If, by chance, you have not had the chance to pray Compline, may I suggest it as a way to end the day or end the week. It can be found starting on p57 of our ACNA Book of Common Prayer. I

believe you will find it a blessing. ***“Go not far from me, O God; my God, make / haste to help me.”*** The Psalmist knows that his help is in the name of the Lord. ***“I will go forth in the strength of the Lord God, and will make mention of your right/eousness, yours alone. 16 You, O God, have taught me from my youth, even to this day I am telling / of your won-drous works.17 Forsake me not, O God, in my old age, when I am gray-head-ed, until I have proclaimed your strength to this generation, and your power to all those / who are yet to come. 18 Your righteousness, O God, reaches to the hea-vens; you have done great things. Who is / like you, O God?”*** The Psalmist sees God’s faithfulness throughout his life, no matter the trial. I have seen people in this Church go through crushing tragedy, yet they never wavered in their trust in God. Unable, in their grief, to discern what to do next, they found that the Lord had gone before and made a way. When you are acting out of your relationship and identity in Christ, you get a front row seat in seeing the Lord glorify Himself for your blessing! ***“Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blest assurance control. That Christ has regarded my helpless estate and has shed His own blood for my soul.”*** These last months since my diagnosis, I have watched in amazement as the Lord has literally taken over things. Every anxiety I feel, He addresses. Every obstacle we face gets removed, not by our might or intelligence or willpower, but by the Spirit of God. ***“Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise. Thou mine inheritance, now and always. Thou and thou only first in my heart. High King of heaven, my treasure thou art.”*** He demonstrates His love for us so that we can imitate Him and love others. We can see how that love works out in our New Testament reading in 1 Cor 14. ***“So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.”*** Paul goes on to propose that we seek the benefit of others over using our gifts. Finding ways to include others rather than insisting on our own gifts or desires. What Paul is talking to here is extending grace to others. That we, who have received such great grace be a conduit of grace to others. ***“Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue. 20 Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.”*** By loving others more than our privilege, by giving grace and not judgment to those not exactly like us, we demonstrate that the Lord is our Lord, and we seek His Glory. When you extend that framework of Christian identity from the Church to the world, you see that our broken and divided world is seeking relationship. It might lead you to participate in the relationship we have with Zeteo. When they hurt, we hurt. Seth has spoken of how we can be in relationship with the poor and abandoned. You might decide to help others through Slammin Famine. Giving grace to others, even on the highway, never actually diminishes the grace we have the Lord. He fills us up with even more grace and blessing when

we love others as ourselves. *“The Lord has promised good to me, His Word my hope secures, He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures. Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come. It’s grace that brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home.”* Let us love as we have been loved by the Lord.

**Conclusion-** To wrap up, many of you have heard me recount the story of Horatio Spafford, who wrote one of our Communion hymns, It is Well with My Soul. The Spafford family was vacationing to London from Chicago to hear DL Moody speak. Horatio, a lawyer and businessman, was delayed, but the family sailed on. Tragically, the boat sank and all 4 Spafford daughters perished. His distraught wife Anna telegraphed the news, “Saved alone.” Spafford, upon reaching the place where his daughters died wrote “It is Well with My Soul.” *“When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll; whatever my lot thou hast taught me to say It is well, it is well with my soul.”* The Spaffords went on to have 3 more children and to devote their life to helping others, particularly in Jerusalem. Horatio is an example of a Christian identity, holding fast to the Saviour despite experiencing tragedy. He was able to hold on because he was held firmly in the loving arms of Jesus. We too, are held in the loving arms of Jesus. He died so we might live, but death could not hold Him. He has overcome sin and death so that we can be with Him. This truly is Amazing grace and Amazing love. God’s love, sings David Crowder, is like a hurricane and we are trees, bending beneath the weight of His wind and mercy. I look out on this congregation and I know many of you have tasted this grace and love. For you, I pray you would abide in God’s grace, loving Him and your neighbor as He has called you. If for any reason, you are not in that place, I pray that you would call on the name of the Lord and see how He has already been working on your behalf. He goes before and we just need to open our hearts and eyes to the grace of our Lord Jesus. Finally, let me thank you all for the Grace you have shown to Fawn and I. It has been a privilege and a blessing to be with you, to worship and serve the Lord at St.Peters. We love you all. May the Lord Bless You, those whom you love and those that you would pray for. Let us pray.

**Closing Prayer-** Lord, you are our Hope and our Salvation. All good things come from you and we thank you for the love and grace we have through your Holy Spirit and your Son, our Lord Jesus. Come, Lord Jesus, show forth your power for your glory. We pray this in the Saving name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.