

Transcription details:

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Transcription results:

- 00:00 Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of this holy night where you manifest not only in stars and with angelic hosts, but also with the small tenderness of a holy child, the great grace that you have poured out into this world to rescue and save us unto yourself. So we ask that the preaching and the ministry of your Word would be your Word for the sake and glory of that Son, Jesus, in His name we pray.
- 00:29 Amen. Please. One of the great things that our church does, and it's part of other congregations in this region, this diocese is what we call it in the Episcopal Church, is a youth gathering called Happening. And at happening, there's teenagers that come from all over the Northeast region out to the Camp and Conference Center, Camp Weed.
- 01:00 And it's a retreat weekend that is entirely run by the youth. And they lead the worship. They give the talks. They organize everything about it. It is really one of the best things that we have going for us. And a lot of the teenagers and even adults, who here has been to a happening? Raise your hand. See there? It's been a major force and impact in the lives of a lot of us.
- 01:30 One of the songs that they played at the last happening was a song that was called "Reckless Love of God." And it was the theme song. And I want to read to you a little bit of some of the lyrics of this song, and then I'll talk about it a little bit. But this is written by Corey Asbury. He says, "Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God.
- 01:57 Oh, it chases me down, fights until I'm found, and leaves the 99. I couldn't earn it. I don't deserve it. Still, you give yourself away. Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God." People have asked the author of that song, Corey, is that the right term to use Billy author? Okay. Writer, the writer of that I write books. He writes songs.
- 02:27 So the writer of that song, he's been asked about that word reckless because it kind of makes God sound like he's not got his act together a little bit. You know When we talk about people driving recklessly down the road, we get out of their way.
- 02:48 But in this case, what he's talking about is he said he was constantly thinking about the parable of the Good Shepherd in the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus tells the story of 100 sheep and the shepherd has 100 sheep, and he loses one. And what does he do? But he leaves the 99 sheep, and he goes after the one.
- 03:15 And he says, "I couldn't help but to keep thinking to myself about the shepherd and what he was doing in that act." And he asked himself a question that became the basis of the song. What kind of love leaves security to pursue the vulnerable? What kind of love leaves security to pursue the vulnerable?
- 03:43 In other words, God had all of the security of the cosmos, heaven and earth, as the creator of it all. And yet, he leaves the throne of heaven, in a sense, as the Son of God, and becomes vulnerable as a little child in a manger.
- 04:09 And on one level, looking at it from our perspective, we might say, "That's a little reckless on the part of God to do such a thing." And so you start to puzzle as to why. Why would he do that? Why would he subject himself to that level of vulnerability? There's a great line in the reading that we heard from Paul's letter to Titus.
- 04:41 Titus was a pastor that Paul had installed on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea, which I kind of feel like Ortega is a little like an island. I like our island. It's a great little island. Crete had a lousy reputation. There was a proverb about people who lived on the island of Crete that said, "Cretons are always liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons.
- 05:11 How would you like to be the priest to the liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons?" That's not you. Not saying that we're the island of Crete. But Paul is encouraging Titus, in light of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, to allow the grace of God that's manifest in Jesus to change us, to make us into the people that God is calling us to be.
- 05:43 And I'll just focus on one line from the letter. And this is in your bulletin, but it's Titus 2:11. "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people." That's a little short little line. I'll say it again. "For the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for all people." Let's just meditate on that a little bit.
- 06:15 What does it mean that the grace of God has appeared? Well, a little bit later on in the letter, Paul says this is a little bit more of an expanded version of what he had just said. He says, "When the goodness and lovingkindness of God, our Savior appeared, He saved us." So that's an expansion on the grace of God. It's the goodness and the loving-kindness of God, His love for us.
- 06:48 Here's the song again that I started with talking about our conception and formation in our mother's womb. Listen to Corey's words. He says, "Before I spoke a word, you were singing over me. You have been so, so good to me. Before I took a breath, you breathed your life in me.
- 07:18 You have been so, so kind to me. God gave us everything, our life. He wrote about all of our days in his book before we were even born. And what Corey is reflecting on is that's the kindness. That's the grace. That's the goodness of God to me, that He has revealed His grace to me.

- 07:46 Later on, he talks about, I guess, reflecting more as a lost sheep, as an adult who has strayed from God's ways, a sinner that needs to be redeemed. And when he was in a rebellious mode in verse 2, he says, "When I was still your foe, your love fought for me. You have been so good to me." When I felt no worth, you paid it all for me.
- 08:15 You have been so kind to me. Do you feel that way about the grace of God? I know we have a little crush here. I think about little baby Jesus in there, and we do all kinds of wonderful things. But let me tell you, the day that Jesus was born and the grace of God has appeared that day, it was way more fanfare than the Tiffany drums and trumpets that we've got.
- 08:45 I mean, just think about all the things that God did to pull out all the stops to say, "Here is the revelation of my grace, dreams being had by people all over the region, visions of miraculous events and prophecies telling them where to go and what to do and who to name and what and so on.
- 09:11 Prophecies written for thousands of years all of the sudden reaching their fulfillment and coming into clarity and sharpness in a way that they had never been clear before. Stars moving across the heavens to guide Magi to the appointed position and place where they could worship the grace that is appearing.
- 09:38 And then heavenly hosts of angels, which means thousands of angels showing up on the scene to sing and praise the Lord. All creation, all the people, shepherds, and kings all pointed at the one revelation of God's grace.
- 10:00 He has been so kind to us to speak with such clarity and such boldness that we don't have to wonder what the answer is or what the solution to the world's problems are or how we can be rescued and saved from all of the evils and difficulties and challenges. The heavens and the earth have declared the glory of God and its Jesus.
- 10:28 This is what Titus sums up in that very simple phrase, "The grace of God has appeared." Grace of God has appeared. And what has the appearance done? It has brought salvation to all people. And for Paul, salvation is something very specific.
- 10:56 It's not a nebulous concept or something vague. Salvation is, in a sense, twofold. One, He redeems us, is what He says, from all lawlessness. The way that He puts it is, "The great Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness." So there's the first thing that He does in saving us is to redeem us.
- 11:26 And then the second thing that He does is that He purifies for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works. Let's think about the two parts. So one is He's redeeming us. What that means is that He's paying the price. I often have a reoccurring nightmare from when I was in college at the University of Florida, that blessed institution.
- 11:54 And I haven't had the nightmare in a while, but I still remember it vividly. I had a season where I didn't go to all my classes. And so it wasn't really even a bad dream. It was an accurate dream. But I would have this nightmare that I skipped all of my classes for Greek, which I was taking Greek at the University of Florida, classical Greek.
- 12:21 And can you imagine skipping all the classes for Greek and showing up on exam day and thinking to yourself, "Oh, no, I have an exam in Greek. I better cram the entire Greek language in one night." There isn't enough coffee in the world to do that. And what that is, to me, is it represents an unbelievable example of debts that I just could not pay, writing checks that I couldn't cash.
- 12:53 I was way over my skis, however you want to put it. I was doing things and living in a way that there was no way I could put things right. And so what I needed was a reset of my life. And this is actually what only God could give me at that point in my life in college was to send somebody into my life to share the good news of Jesus.
- 13:26 And I reached out and asked for forgiveness, and I knew that I knew that I knew I needed a blank slate. I needed a tablara. I needed a clean start because there was no way I was going to make up for all the mistakes and mess-ups that I had made up to that point. No way I could pay the price. And that's what redemption is. We just prayed this prayer I did for whom all desires are known.
- 13:58 No secrets are hid. He knows everything about your life, every single thing, every single secret. Now, you probably wouldn't want everybody in this room to know all your secrets, right? But God knows every single one of your secrets. He knows all of the mistakes you made, all of the sins that you've committed, and all of the bad thoughts that you've ever thought, and the things that you've done to everybody in your life for good and for bad. And he's not making a naughty or nice list like somebody that we know.
- 14:30 But what he's doing is he's saying, "I am paying for the whole list. I'm redeeming you. I'm buying you out of this bondage and this trap to legalism and to guilt and to shame. And I'm setting you free. And I'm not negotiating with your hostages. I'm paying full price in your mind." Isn't that amazing? It's just awesome. And then that's not all.
- 15:00 Then what he says, he says, "I'm going to clean your life up. I'm going to take that which has now been redeemed for myself, and I'm going to, over time, purify you to become the person that I need and want you to be." Glorious. He has been so good to you and to me, so kind.
- 15:27 That's the grace of God appearing through the gift of His Son, Jesus, and the outpouring of His Holy Spirit. And it's because He loves you. I mean, the way Corey puts it is, "There's no shadow that you won't light up, Lord. There's no mountain you won't climb up. Coming after me. There's no wall you won't kick down. Lie you won't tear down coming after me.
- 16:00 Not just me, but you. And that's what the verse says. It says let me go back to the Scripture. "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people." You hear that last part? For all people. You say, "Well, maybe not me." No, it said, "All

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people.

16:28 All people." Yeah, but you know I've really messed up. I've done a lot of things. Nope, all people. He is bringing grace that is appearing in the gift of His Son to bring salvation, which is redemption and purification of your life for all people.

16:50 And whatever the wall is, whatever the darkness is, whatever the secret is, whatever barrier is there, he will leave the 99 and come after you.