

Art in Jesus' Hands

Small Group Sermon Study

Week of June 28

Begin with a Check-in:

Ask each person to think of a *time since you last met* when you experienced God's mercy. Take turns stating, "I felt God's mercy when . . ."

Based upon the needs expressed, use discernment about whether to spend time in prayer and the encouragement of Scripture, or to proceed with the study.

The following provides a guide for conversation about the sermon:

Pray: Invite God's presence by the Holy Spirit, thanking Him for what he will reveal through this study

Read: Read Ephesians 2:1-10 out loud together:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.

¹⁰For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Dialogue: Facilitate dialogue to explore what it means to embody the grace God has provided in Christ. Use the following observations and questions to guide conversation:

What is grace and what does it do?

Let's start with what Paul says about grace in this passage. Read verses 4 to 9 again asking people to note what Paul is saying about grace, such as . . .

- V.4 Grace is the extension of God's love and mercy. There is no grace without love and mercy.
- V.5 Grace saves us. (In other places, like Romans 5-8, grace is about justification as well. But here only salvation is the point.)
- V.6 Specifically, grace allows us to participate in Jesus' resurrection.
- V.8-9 Grace is a gift ("unmerited favor") You cannot earn it, or brag about deserving it.

How has grace been misunderstood or misused by Christians?

There are at least two ways that grace has been misunderstood or misused by Christians. Take some time to define each briefly and welcome dialogue about what this might mean for us: personally and as a church:

1. **Emptying grace of true worth:** Dietrich Bonhoeffer¹ a German pastor and theologian, coined the term "cheap" grace" in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*."

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer was pastor of the Confessional Church in Germany at the time of Hitler. For preaching the Gospel, resisting the Third Reich and condemning Hitler, he was arrested by the Gestapo and sent to the concentration camp at Buchenwald. As the allies were liberating Germany, Bonhoeffer was moved from camp to camp ahead of the approaching forces. On the morning of April 9th 1945, just a few days before it was liberated by the Allies, Bonhoeffer was executed at the Flossenburg concentration camp.

Bonhoeffer wrote this:

"Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace.

"Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjack wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolation of religion are thrown away at cut prices . . . The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing . . . Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

"Costly grace is "costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. . .

"Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of His Son; "ye were bought with a price," and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon His son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us."

How have we cheapened the value of grace?

2. **Emptying grace of true power:** But there is another, more recent, way Christians have misunderstood or misused grace, *by using power ungraciously*, robbing grace of God's re-creating, transformative power. Jesus models and Paul teaches a grace that exhibits radical upside-down power in contrast to the coercive power of Caesar (Empire) and the hypocritical power of the religious elite (Pharisees etc.)

How have you witnessed Christians use power coercively or hypocritically? (Think finger-pointing or fear-mongering in politics, social media; using labels such as "liberal" or "conservative" to divide.)

How have you used power ungraciously?

How does Paul describe grace at work? Contrast what many in the church are doing today to what Paul describes. We are God's handiwork; God's re-creation. We are "Art in Jesus' Hands."

What would it look like to embody grace for all Jesus' worth and power?

How would it change you and our church if we saw ourselves as God's painting? His song? His poem?

Close in prayer asking God to make us truly alive in Christ.