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**A GRACE IN PROGRESS**

Today is Reformation Sunday.

- “Reform” - it means to fix something.
- Something has gotten off, so you want to reform it.
- Even Churches need a some reforming every now and then.

You can hear how the word “reform” is embedded in the word “Reformation.”

What we call “Lutheran” now was not initially intended to become a separate church but was intended to be a reforming movement within the one church, an effort to correct course and fix something important that had gotten off in the church.

- The church had gotten something backwards.
- It had gotten “up and down” backwards when it came to God.

Think of your kitchen sink. It works in a “down first” way.

- You don’t fill the sink from the drain.
- The water flows “down” from the faucet into the sink.
- But it fills “up” only because the water first came “down.”
- That’s how faith and worship and Christianity all is supposed to work – in a “down first” way. From God to us.

There are two kinds of religion: “Up Religion” and “Down Religion.”

- Up Religion is about people trying to be good enough for God, earning forgiveness, doing good works earn a place in heaven, trying to work our way “up” to God. The key word of up religion is “works.”
- Down Religion is about God coming down to us, God making the first move to come to us in love, in grace, to us who are undeserving sinners. Jesus came down to us. The key word for down religion is “grace.”

The church had started getting this all backwards:

- Forgiveness, many said, was something you had to earn through the satisfactions you performed in order to earn it. Works.
- The Reformers said, “That’s backwards.” Forgiveness comes down from God as a gift given through Jesus and only received by us in faith. Grace.
- Worship, many said, is something we do in order to get credit with God. Works.
- The Reformers said, “That’s backwards.” Worship is God’s party to which we are invited to be God-honoring guests. Grace.
- God’s love, many said, is for those who deserve it. Works.
- Jesus himself said, that’s backwards. God’s love is especially for those who don’t deserve it. Grace.

That's the key thing that was trying to get reformed in the Reformation, trying to fix the church where it had turned Christianity and worship into an up religion and had forgotten that's all really to about God coming down to us in grace.

- But isn't being good important? Yes, it is.
- Aren't we to do good works? Yes, we are.
- Aren't we to hope for some transformation from having Christ in our life? Yes, grace is not intended to leave the same as you were before.

But all this comes as response to and consequence of God first coming to us.

None of it is how we somehow earn God's favor, God's blessings, or a better place in heaven. God comes to us in His word; God comes to us in Jesus Christ; God comes to us first.

- This is really good news if you're broken and unable to get up to God.
- And we're all broken like that; that's what we mean when we say we are sinful. Try as we might, we're not going to ever be good enough for God.
- The good news is that God is good enough, gracious enough, loving enough to still save us.

There's a somewhat comforting phrase we use to admit our imperfections yet claim we should still get some credit because we are at least still trying.

- We ease up a little on ourselves and say, "I'm a work in progress."
- We ease up a little in our judgement of someone and say, he or she is "a work in progress."

There is something good and forgiving about that. But eventually, the comfort of that phrase might run dry for you when you realize that progress you're claiming isn't going so well; it isn't going to get you to your goal.

- You are working, but you are not progressing, and that is depressing.

The trouble when a "work in progress" thinking is applied to religion is that it is just an easier-going form of "up religion," still aimed at being good enough, or at least at trying enough, to please God and earn God's love.

- Here's some homework for you for this week. Try this phrase instead, "grace in progress."
- "I'm a grace in progress." Give that a little prayer and reflection time.

With grace, God's love comes first. You're not trying to earn it; God already gave it to you.

- The formula is not Work then Progress then God's Love. That's the formula of Works.
- The formula of Grace is God's Love as the first thing. With God's love in hand, as your healing place, with God's love in hand as you're getting up place, with God's love already yours there can and will be life transformation, beginning with the transformation of peace. That's the formula of Grace.

Life maybe has knocked you down hard with all that's going on, but you're a grace in progress. God's got ya! Life has maybe even broken you somehow, but you've got a love and promise bigger and stronger than anything the bad in this world can throw at you. You are still a grace in progress and that grace will see you all the way home. God's got ya! That's grace. Amen.