

## **Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Reno, NV**

### **Pastor Scott Trevithick**

Date: July 6, 2025, Week 2 of 3 on Ephesians

Text: Ephesians 3:1-13, 4:1-7

Title: Our Gifts Emerge through Grace

Focus: Grace brings healing and helps us to discover and use our gifts.

### **Epistle Reading: Ephesians 3:1-13, 4:1-7**

This is the reason that I, Paul, am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you gentiles, <sup>2</sup>for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you <sup>3</sup>and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, <sup>4</sup>a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. <sup>5</sup>In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: <sup>6</sup>that is, the gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

<sup>7</sup>Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. <sup>8</sup>Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ <sup>9</sup>and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, <sup>10</sup>so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>11</sup>This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, <sup>12</sup>in whom we have access in boldness and confidence through faith in him. <sup>13</sup>I pray, therefore, that you may not lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory.

<sup>4:1</sup> I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: <sup>4</sup>there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. <sup>7</sup>But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.

### **Grace Offers Healing**

Last Sunday in worship we talked about *grace* as a theme of the letter to the Ephesians. "What is grace?" was the question I posed in the sermon.

- Later in the sermon, I responded to that question by describing grace as *something that I do not deserve and cannot earn*.

Grace is easier to recognize when you see it taking place in your own life or in the life of someone close to you. To demonstrate grace, I told the story of some pivotal scenes from the movie *Good Will Hunting* with Matt Damon as Will and Robin Williams as his therapist Sean.

- Will was a young man troubled by the trauma he had experienced.
- Sean, Will's therapist, extended grace to him.
- Do you recall the phrase Sean repeated to Will in his office as they talked about the trauma which Will had experienced?
  - Ten times Sean said this to Will—Do you remember what he said?
  - "It's not your fault."

This was Sean's way of acknowledging the pain inflicted upon Will. This phrase, repeated until Will began to hear it, conveyed additional messages:

- The bad stuff (He used stronger language than this.) that happened to you is not your fault.
- You did not deserve this.
- You are worthy to be loved.
- You are free to pursue love—to find fulfillment.

Sean's caring persistence with Will as well as his own acknowledgement of the trauma that he, too, had experienced, helped build trust between them that allowed Will to hear these words of grace. ***It's not your fault.***

That grace, in turn, was a source of healing for Will and created a breakthrough for him, which was shown in last week's sermon by the picture of his car headed West to meet Skylar.

Sean told Will about how he met his wife and described how his deep investment in that relationship led him to live a life without regret. He never wondered, "What could have been. . ." because he didn't hold back, worried about what pain he might encounter.

Hearing that honesty from someone Will trusted was a part of him deciding to live boldly in the same way. Rather than wondering somewhere down the line how things might have worked out had he not broken up with Skylar out of fear of the unknown, he decided to pursue the relationship.

You could say that the grace that Sean offered Will enabled him to be more fully himself. He was freed by grace to love himself and to give and receive love in his relationship with Skylar.

## **Grace in the Letter to the Ephesians**

This way of grace echoes what prompted the letter to the Ephesians. Paul was writing to a community of Gentiles who in a similar way didn't believe they were good enough. There were afraid that God didn't accept them. They worried that they didn't belong to God's family because they were not Jewish like Jesus, the Apostles, and Paul. This letter reassures them in the same way Sean reassures Will. They belong to God not because they have passed some test, but by God's grace.

The good news written to the Ephesians is good news to us, too.

- Do you ever wonder if God really does love you and accept you as you are?
- Or have you ever asked yourself, “Am I good enough?”
  - **A catechism asks, for instance,** “Don’t you have to be good for God to love you?”<sup>1</sup>
  - The reassuring response is. . .
    - No. God loves me in spite of all I do wrong.
- We belong to God not because of who we are or aren’t, but because of who *God* is and what *God* has done.

## **Paul, a Prisoner and a Persecutor of the Followers of Jesus**

If Paul’s words of grace were not reassurance enough that we belong to God by the grace of God, he refers to his own story:

### **Paul was a prisoner**

At the beginning of chapter 3 and again in chapter 4, Paul describes himself as a **prisoner for Christ**.

- A person might caution him, “Um, Paul, maybe that’s not what you’d want to lead with. Maybe that’s not the first thing you’d want to tell people.”
  - “I, Paul, am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you gentiles. . .” (Eph. 3:1)
  - In chapter 4, he calls himself “a prisoner in the Lord” (4:1).

Rather than hide this about himself, Paul highlights it as a part of his identity or as a sign of his willingness to take on any challenge. It’s a sign of his authenticity or determination. Rather than be embarrassed about having been imprisoned, he embraces it—boldly telling them this is what he’s willing to do or that he’s not going to let it be a barrier in pursuing his mission.

### **Paul was one who had persecuted followers of Jesus**

Along with Paul’s imprisonment, which wasn’t just once, but multiple times, he alludes to his personal history as one who persecuted followers of Jesus, calling himself “the least of all the saints” (3:8). (See Acts chapter 9 for the full story of how Paul as Saul persecuted followers of “the Way.”)

The way that Paul describes it here in chapter 3, he

- Acknowledges that he is unworthy; he calls himself “the least likely of all the saints.” He may be referring to a number of personal characteristics, but I think

---

<sup>1</sup> Question 4 in *Belonging to God: A First Catechism*. Question 4. Approved by the 210th General Assembly (1998) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

he's acutely aware of how he was harming the people he was now called to serve.

- He highlights that he was imprisoned for the sake of the gospel. Being imprisoned is not something most people would be proud of.
- He declares that by grace, he was called for a particular purpose; he has a job to do. He was commissioned to tell them the good news that God's love stretches out to the Ephesians, too.
- Paul emphasized that it was not his own remarkable effort that got him to this place. He directly attributes his role and his ability to carry out this call to the power and grace of God.
  - <sup>7</sup> Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. <sup>8</sup> Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ <sup>9</sup> and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things,
  - Paul is saying that it isn't him initiating this ability; it is God working in him:
    - God's grace is the source of his own ability to preach (v. 8) and to "bring to light" the "mystery" of the Gospel, which is the full inclusion of the Gentiles in the one "body" of the Messiah (v. 6).

## The Role of Grace

So, if Paul acknowledges his unworthiness or the things that might cause some people shame, specifically mentioning his imprisonment and alluding to his persecution of followers of Jesus, and celebrates the gift of grace, how might we see the role of grace in our own lives?

- **What if grace helps us turn what could be a weakness or detriment into a gift used by God?**

In the movie *Good Will Hunting*, Sean's reassurance to Will, "**It's not your fault,**" were words of grace that brought healing and opened the door to a future that was more whole and fulfilling.

In this letter to the Ephesians, Paul recognizes that by grace, God has called him to proclaim the good news to the Gentiles in Ephesus despite his flaws.

For all the times that we doubt ourselves or tell ourselves that we aren't good enough or lament the things we have done or the pain we've experienced, what's the good news for us?

- First of all, following what Paul says, it's not about us, but about God's grace and power working in us.

- As we said before, it's not because of who we are or aren't, but because of who *God* is and what *God* has done.
- Along with that, for us to have painful experiences in our lives be transformed into something that can be used for good or even seen as a gift or a source of strength, I think we have to acknowledge that pain.

## Wisdom from Richard Rohr

I'll rely on wisdom from Richard Rohr to help me to express this—how painful experiences can become powerful ways that we touch the lives of others.

First of all, Richard Rohr offers a caution: **“Trauma that is not transformed is transmitted.”**

What that wisdom means to me is that if we have experienced trauma and try to ignore it or pretend it didn't happen or that it didn't have any impact on us, we are deceiving ourselves and it's more likely that we will, to use Rohr's word, ***transmit*** that pain to others, meaning that we will act out of our own pain and harm others.

### What's an example of that?

- Emotional and Behavioral Patterns: People who have experienced trauma might develop unhealthy coping mechanisms like overcompensating behaviors, emotional numbing, or a tendency to lash out at others, which can impact their relationships and create further harm.
  - In *Good Will Hunting*, Will told made up stories about happy childhood memories with many siblings.
  - Emotional numbing: He pretended that something didn't hurt him when it did.
  - Lashing out: The reason that he was seeing Sean as his therapist was that it was a part of a court sentencing bargain. He had been repeatedly charged with crimes as a result of this otherwise unexpressed anger.

Rohr says our natural instinct is to try to fix pain, to control it. . .

*From Richard Rohr:*

If only we could see these “wounds” as *the way through*, as Jesus did, then they would become sacred wounds rather than scars to deny, disguise, or project onto others. I am sorry to admit that I first see my wounds as an obstacle more than a gift. Healing is a long journey.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Richard Rohr, “Transforming Pain” Posted Oct. 17, 2018, at Center for Action and Contemplation. Richard Rohr founded this center in 1987. <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/transforming-pain-2018-10-17/>

**How can we be open to having that pain transformed into a gift God can use for good?**

**Transforming trauma:** (From a summary of Rohr's work.)

Rohr's message, echoed by others, is that individuals and communities can choose to break this cycle by actively transforming their pain. This transformation can involve:

- **Saying it is painful—**Acknowledge the pain: Identifying and understanding the trauma is a crucial step towards healing.
- **Get Help:** Will initially went to see Sean because of the court order. But that's of course what transformed his pain. Engaging in therapy, spiritual practices, or seeking help from trusted sources.
- **Developing empathy and compassion:** Focusing on how actions impact others and cultivating a heart of empathy can help prevent the transmission of pain.
- **Hope for others:** Finding meaning in suffering: Transforming trauma can lead to personal growth and offer hope to others who are struggling.

**Rohr's summary:**

Please trust me on this. We must all *carry the cross of our own reality* until God transforms us through it. *These are the wounded healers of the world, and healers who have fully faced their wounds are the only ones who heal anyone else.*<sup>3</sup>

**Closing:**

Painful experiences can be transformed by God's grace . . . Paul, "a prisoner of the Lord," actually has good news to share with others that they (the Ephesians) belong because of the grace of God. Perhaps it is because of painful experiences that Paul can share those words with authenticity. May the pain in our lives be transformed by the grace of God so that we can be gifts of grace to others as well.

**Closing Prayer** (See p. 35 of *Receiving Grace* study)

God of all, your power working in us is doing more than we can ask or imagine. Your grace works in us, even when we don't see or feel it. Help us to know the gifts you give us, so we may be who you created us to be, as members of the Body of Christ in your church and in the world. Amen.

---

<sup>3</sup> Richard Rohr, "Transforming Pain" (cited earlier).