



# GRACE, MERCY, PEACE

## 2024 PRAYER SERVICE

### LEADER GUIDE

By Rev. Michael Mattil

*Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (1 Timothy 1:2b; 2 Timothy 1:2).*

*Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love (2 John 1:3).*

At some point you have probably heard a pastor say something similar to these verses at the beginning of a sermon. Paul wrote this in his greetings at the beginning of both of his letters to Timothy, and John used it in his second epistle.

This service is designed around those three words, those three gifts that come to us from our gracious Father and our Savior: Grace, Mercy, and Peace.

### Invocation

**L** In the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit.

**C** Amen.

**L** We are gathered together in the name of the one true God.

We know He is the Author of Creation.

We come here in the confidence that we have been saved by our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are here assured that the Spirit of God has brought us to faith and keeps us in that one true faith.

*Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love (2 John 1:3).*

### Hymn/Song of Confession

"I Lay My Sins on Jesus" (LSB 606)

"Hide Me In Your Holiness" by Steve Ragsdale

"Chief of Sinners Though I Be" (LSB 611)

- L** Let us confess our sins before God and in the presence of one another.
- C** **Most holy and merciful Father, we confess to You and to one another that we have sinned both in our actions and in our failure to act.**

*(A brief silence for individual prayer and confession)*

- L** Merciful Father, give us pardon and peace and free us from our sin for the sake of Christ, our Savior.
- C** **Amen.**
- L** You are forgiven and reconciled to God through Christ our Lord. So let us be reconciled to one another and share the peace of our Lord with our sisters and brothers in Christ.

*(Share God's peace with one another)*

## GRACE

### Hymn/Song

**"By Grace I'm Saved" (LSB 566)**

**"Grace Alone" by Scott Wesley Brown**

**"Your Grace is Enough" by Chris Tomlin**

**"Blessed Are the Sons of God" (TLH 391)**

**"Grace! 'Tis a Charming Sound" (TLH 374)**

### Matthew 20:1–16

<sup>1</sup> "For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup> After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup> And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, <sup>4</sup> and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.' <sup>5</sup> So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. <sup>6</sup> And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' <sup>7</sup> They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' <sup>8</sup> And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.' <sup>9</sup> And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. <sup>10</sup> Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. <sup>11</sup> And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, <sup>12</sup> saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' <sup>13</sup> But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?' <sup>14</sup> Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. <sup>15</sup> Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' <sup>16</sup> So the last will be first, and the first last."

## Thoughts on Grace

*(Leader text found at the end of the service document.)*

## Prayer for Grace

**L** Almighty God, You have given us so much in our lives. Your abundant grace has given us salvation and newness of life. May that grace continue to bless us so that we may use these gifts You have bestowed on us to Your honor and glory.

*(Pause for a moment of silent prayer before concluding)*

Give us hearts that are grateful for the grace You have shown us in our lives. Amen.

# MERCY

## Hymn/Song

“Today Your Mercy Calls Us” (LSB 915)

“Thy Mercy” by Caedmon’s Call

“When All Thy Mercies, O My God” (TLH 31)

## Matthew 18:21–35

<sup>21</sup> Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

<sup>23</sup> “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. <sup>25</sup> And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. <sup>26</sup> So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ <sup>27</sup> And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. <sup>28</sup> But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ <sup>29</sup> So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ <sup>30</sup> He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. <sup>32</sup> Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup> And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ <sup>34</sup> And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. <sup>35</sup> So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

## Thoughts on Mercy

*(Leader text found at the end of the service document.)*

### Prayer for Mercy

- L** Lord, even though our sins deserve Your condemnation, Your mercy has given us pardon, Your compassion has given us restoration. Without Your mercy we would not be able to stand before You, but for Jesus' sake You have accepted us. It is in His name that we acknowledge Your overflowing, loving kindness and offer You our praise again this day.

*(Pause for a moment of silent prayer before concluding)*

Give us hearts that are grateful for the mercy You have shown us in our lives. Amen.

## PEACE

### Hymn/Song

“When Peace, like a River” (*LSB* 763)

“What a Friend We Have in Jesus” (*LSB* 770)

“Through Jesus’ Blood and Merit” (*TLH* 372)

### Romans 5:1–11

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

<sup>6</sup> For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— <sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

<sup>9</sup> Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup> More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

## Thoughts on Peace

*(Leader text found at the end of the service document.)*

## Prayer for Peace

- L** Everything good and just and holy comes from You, Almighty God, including the peace that the world cannot give us. May the knowledge of the peace You have given encourage us to live lives in keeping with Your commandments. Send Your Spirit to empower us to be instruments of Your peace where we live.

*(Pause for a moment of silent prayer before concluding)*

Give us hearts that are grateful for the peace You have given us in our lives. Amen.

## Benediction

- L** *Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.*  
**G** Amen.

## Closing Song

**“In Christ Alone” by Stuart Townend and Keith Getty**

**“Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice” (LSB 556)**

**“Sing Praise to God, the Highest Good” (LSB 819)**

**“Go, My Children, with My Blessing” (LSB 922)**

**Leader Notes**

*The hymns and songs listed are merely suggestions. Several possibilities are given in each instance. Select whatever songs are appropriate for your setting, trying to select ones that reflect the suggested theme of that portion of the service. The sections titled “Thoughts About ... ” may be read verbatim by the woman leading if done in a small group setting or may be used as ideas for homily preparation if led by a pastor.*

# THOUGHTS ON GRACE

Think about what you make in a year. I'm talking money here. How much do you make in a year? Do you know how much a doctor or a lawyer makes in a year? How about professional athletes? Their salaries are ridiculous. So are the salaries of television and movie stars. And what about those CEOs who make millions and then bail out with their golden parachutes after bankrupting a company! Or what about men and women who have the same job, but one gets paid more than the other!

If you want to get people upset very quickly, all you have to do is start talking about salaries. When you compare your salary to someone else's, it is usually someone who makes more than you, even though they seem to have less skill and education. And you get upset, but usually you just let it simmer inside of you. "It isn't fair!" And that is the tension Jesus addressed in this parable. "A fair day's pay for a fair day's work." Isn't that what we all want, what's fair?

Jesus was and is a master story teller. One of the main farm crops in Israel was grapes, so Jesus tells a story about harvesting grapes. There was this man who owned a vineyard and needed workers to harvest his grapes. He went to the village square at six o'clock in the morning and hired workers who went out and worked all day for 12 hours until six at night. A typical 12-hour workday. But he needed more workers, so he found more and hired them at nine o'clock in the morning and they worked for nine hours. He found more at noon who worked for six hours; some found at three o'clock worked for three hours; and those who came late in the afternoon at five o'clock worked the last hour. They worked only one hour, and do you know what? The owner of the vineyard gave them a full day's wage. Those early birds and industrious people, who had worked all day from six o'clock in the morning for the full 12 hours under the heat of the sun, those workers were mad that the latecomers received the same wage they got.

That makes sense to me. Don't you get mad when you have been working hard all day long and someone else comes in and does a little bit of work and they get the same wage as you? Doesn't it make you mad when you are putting in the time, doing all the work, while someone else near you is sloughing off, and they get the same salary. Doesn't that make you mad?

The workers in the vineyard didn't stop to understand the meaning of the parable because they were so upset about the situation itself. But there is a lesson. Jesus is talking GRACE. God dispenses gifts, not wages. We don't get paid according to what we have earned, because none of us comes close to satisfying God's requirements for a perfect life. If paid on the basis of fairness, we would all be destined for hell. The wages of our sin is death. We need to understand that God's grace gives all of us what we don't deserve.

None of the workers in the parable were cheated. They thought they were, but they were not. Not a single worker was underpaid. According to human reasoning, some were overpaid, but nobody was cheated. The complaint of the early workers was jealousy, not reality. None of them received

less than they had been promised and expected, but some received more. What is key here, is that the landowner had the right to "overpay" the late workers. He said, "whatever is right I will give you." The owner determined what was right based on grace, not on human accounting. His overpayment of the late workers was his choice. It was a gift. It was Grace — undeserved love. That is the exact same way you and I get to heaven.

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8–9 NIV).*

I would guess that sometimes we find ourselves feeling like the 12-hour workers. But I would hope there are also times when we feel like those one-hour workers, the ones who know that what God gives has not been earned. It is not deserved. We are the recipients of God's grace. I pray we all come to know that we are undeserving of all that God has given — His love, His forgiveness, His Grace, and that we live in response to that.

***Optional additional thought:***

*The Newsboys put out a song called "Real Good Thing." The refrain of that song is a good description of how God deals with us because of His grace.*

*When we don't get what we deserve, that's a real good thing, a real good thing.  
When we get what we don't deserve, that's a real good thing, a real good thing*



# THOUGHTS ON MERCY

A man was forgiven a tremendous debt that he could not pay. A talent was 20 years of wages for a common laborer. Ten talents would be 200 years of wages. Ten thousand talents were beyond ridiculous for a common worker to even dream of being able to pay. The master was going to sell the man and his family into slavery, followed by his possessions, and even that would not begin to pay this staggering debt. So he falls to his knees and begs for mercy: “Give me time and I’ll pay it all back.” The master knows that will never be possible, but has pity on the man, cancels the debt, and sets him free. Can you imagine the burden that was lifted from his shoulders through this merciful act? How great must it have felt to know that a dark cloud was no longer hanging over him! So he goes out rejoicing and shares his good fortune with everyone he meets, right? No. In fact, this man, who had just been set free from what would have been a life sentence of slavery, instead finds a guy who owes him a hundred denarii. A denarius was a day’s wage, so this would have been about 100 **days**’ worth of wages. He had just been forgiven 200,000 years’ worth of wages but did not show mercy to the one who owed him **100 days of** pay. Instead of showing mercy, he has him thrown into prison.

Word of what happened gets back to the master. He says that since this man refused to show the compassion he had been shown, no mercy would be shown to him. He would be sent to a place of torture. And Jesus concludes: “So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

There is a link between forgiveness and mercy. God, in mercy, compassion, and kindness, does not give us what our deeds deserve. We have the impossibly huge, insurmountable debt of sin in our lives. That deserves death and punishment and torture. But God forgives it all for Jesus’ sake. Jesus lived the perfection God requires, and then offered that for the sins of everyone else. With His holy, precious blood, with His innocent suffering and death, Jesus satisfied the judgment that stood against us and everyone else. Mercy — and forgiveness — are ours for Jesus’ sake.

Because we have received this, we should be showing acts of mercy to our neighbor, including and perhaps even especially to those who have done us wrong. Show them what it means to be a forgiven and forgiving child of God.

It is easy for us to lash out against those we think have done us wrong. But that is not the life God calls us to live.

*<sup>27</sup> “But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. <sup>29</sup> If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic” (Luke 6:27–29 NIV).*

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21 NIV).*

God has shown you His mercy in Jesus Christ. He forgave your overwhelming debt by paying for your sin. In response to what He has done for you, Jesus wants you to extend mercy to your neighbors.

Jesus told that parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9–14). They both went to the Temple to pray. The Pharisee was confident in his own deeds and righteousness. He was smug as he approached the Lord. “I thank you that I’m not like all the sinners out there — or like this miserable fellow.” His arrogant, self-righteous attitude gets him nowhere with God. However, the tax collector was aware of his failings, his shortcomings, his unworthiness, his sin. He could not even bring himself to look up to heaven. When we are truly aware of our sins, we cry out with that tax collector, “God, be merciful to me a sinner.” We want it. We crave it. And for Jesus’ sake we have received it from God. He does not give us what our sins deserve. He has shown us His loving kindness, His compassion, His mercy.

Lord, help us to show others the mercy You have shown to us!

# THOUGHTS ON PEACE

Alistair Cooke published an article in 2003. He was at that time 95 years old and for over 60 years had broadcast his weekly “Letter from America” on the BBC. This particular article appeared just before the second Gulf War started, and he was addressing all the cries for PEACE. He recalled similar voices in the 1930’s in his native England, especially then Prime Minister Chamberlain saying: “I believe it is peace for our time.” Cooke recalled that sentence prompted a huge cheer from the listening street crowd, from the House of Commons and from every newspaper in the land. There was a sentiment that Mr. Chamberlain should receive the Nobel Peace Prize. But it wasn’t long before England realized that Hitler had lied to them. He got them to agree to peace so he could trample Europe underfoot. Great Britain learned a hard lesson: peace, real peace, comes at a great cost.

Things haven’t changed much: Russian and the Ukraine; drug wars in Mexico; ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Somalia, Yemen, the Sudan, and any number of “hot spots” are a constant concern. One lesson that should be learned from history is that peace is costly. Peace comes at a price. Peace does not mean closing your eyes and pretending your enemies don’t exist, or that what is happening somewhere else in the world doesn’t concern you. Because of sin in this world, we will continue to have tyrants and terrorists and forces of evil that work against peace. In order to have peace, sometimes war is an unfortunate necessity. The concept of a just war is one that has peace as its goal. Such a war is not an act of aggression but an attempt to end aggression. Yet Christians continue to have viewpoints on both sides of that issue.

As we ponder all of this, we should do so, as we should ponder all things, in light of God’s Word. Speaking to His disciples at the Last Supper, Jesus said:

*“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33 NIV).*

And a little earlier that same evening He had said:

*“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27 NIV).*

Something Jesus makes very clear is that His peace, the peace most often spoken of in Scripture, is not of this world. It is the peace that He established between God and man by coming into this world, living a perfect life, and offering that life in payment for the sins of all people. In this world we will have trouble, but Jesus has overcome the world for us. We know that this is not all there is. Because of the peace that Jesus has established between God and His fallen creation, we know the message of forgiveness, the message of life, the message of salvation that is ours despite all that is going on in the world around us. That is what Paul is talking about in Romans 5.

We live in God's grace. That means even though we don't deserve it, God has established peace with us because of what Jesus did in our place. And we rejoice in this peace, the hope, and certainty that we will enter into the glory of God's presence because of our faith in Jesus.

So why did Paul say that we can rejoice in our sufferings?

- How can you rejoice when your body is wearing out and your organs are failing and there is nothing anyone can do about it?
- How can you rejoice when the economic downturn causes you to lose your job or your retirement savings?
- How can you rejoice when you are going through a bitter divorce?
- How can you rejoice when you lose a baby to SIDS?
- How can you rejoice in the face of disease and cancer and war?

Paul says REJOICE in your suffering because suffering produces perseverance, perseverance produces character, character produces hope, and hope will not disappoint you. That may not sound like a great deal of comfort while you are in the midst of a traumatic situation, but actually, it is. No matter what is going on in your life, look to the cross and the empty tomb. Focus on the hope that is yours in Christ Jesus, a hope that is always yours. Paul called it the hope of the glory of God. That is yours through faith in Jesus. You live in the confident knowledge that because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, you have peace with God.

Paul reminds us that while we were enemies of God, He stepped up and reconciled us to Himself. We were His enemies because of our sin, our inadequacy, our failure to live according to His righteous requirements. We were enemies because of our rejection of Him. But while we were His enemies, He sent His Son to die in our place, thereby reconciling us to Himself, making peace. That peace was costly, but the price was paid for us by Jesus.

Something to note is the tense of the verbs: *We have been justified, we have peace, we have obtained access, we have now been justified, we were reconciled.* These verbs are either in the past or perfect tense, which means they have already taken place. What's more, they're in the passive voice, meaning that we didn't do anything toward our salvation. Therefore, salvation is not something yet to be accomplished, because God already did everything for us to be saved. ***We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*** That is why we can rejoice even in suffering. That is the peace for our time, the peace for ALL time.