

**Proper 20 (A)**  
Pastor Ed Harkey

Isaiah 55:6-9  
TLC, Keene, NH

*“Grace Finds a Home”*

*“Let [them] return to the Lord that He may have compassion on [them] ... for He will abundantly pardon.”*

*“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.” [Psalm 34:19]*

### **Introduction**

*“No, I have not lost faith.”* So confesses the priest of Ambricourt, in George Bernanos’ *Diary of a Country Priest*. Lonely, sickly, a child of poverty, he strives throughout the novel to be honest with himself, struggling to believe that his work as a priest has some enduring meaning. Yet, the cruelty of his illness has humbled him. It has shattered his reason and his nerves. Joy has withered within him. Still, he boldly asserts, “My faith is whole ... let me try and put it as plainly, and innocently as possible ... I have not lost faith because *God* has graciously kept me.”

Indeed! Wherein, not only does God grant faith as a gift, He expends no small amount of grace in order to sustain and to keep us in this most blessed estate.

**Main Point:** Wherein, life as a Christian is not always be easy. But we are not left to an uncertain outcome. As God once sought us in grace, He sustains and keeps us in the same. Where, all the power to live resides in God’s gracious invitation to us, so that we might find forgiveness, life and salvation in Him.

True: “His voice, His call, His inviting word alone has the power to convert. Where that voice no longer is heard, there is no more opportunity to come to grace.” [Pieper, *Isaiah II*, 487]

But that is not today. Where, if we are hearing or reading this Word from the Lord, the opportunity is still here.

Let ours be the confidence of Paul:

*“In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”* [2 Corinthians 6:2]

SOUGHT IN GRACE, KEPT BY GRACE, GRACE NOW FINDS A HOME.

Amen.

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“The iniquitous ways of Judah and Jerusalem have become a festering wound, and God’s devastating judgment is falling upon them (Isaiah 1:4-7); the assaults of Assyria and eventually the exile imposed by Babylon. Yet under the dominant theme of comfort (40:1), Isaiah also proclaims hope through the obedient work of Yahweh’s Servant (in chapters 42, 49, 50 and 53).” [Eggers, *CJ*, 40:3, 249-250]

Perhaps this is your context today also: not given to complete hopelessness or despair of Israel ... but you are feeling weather-beaten and worn, frayed, despondent, under duress.

Good News! God is in residence today, with His promise of grace – manifested in His Word of forgiveness, reaffirmed by a prophet from another time, and by a parable of an ever-present Savior.

Consider yourself ... INVITED.

<sup>1</sup> *“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters [the Lord beckons at the outset of Isaiah 55]; he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ... Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. <sup>3</sup> Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live.*

Talk about an invitation ... a Word that is always right on time!

LUTHER: The Gospel is like a passing shower that gives life-giving moisture but keeps moving away from those who reject the opportunity for repentance and life. [*Sermon Studies on the Gospels (SSoG)*, A:310]

But to life, to life! The refreshing rain has fallen ... the messianic moisture poured out in abundance upon us ... the still-welcomed invitation again being issued forth.

**<sup>6</sup> “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; <sup>7</sup> let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD ...**

NB: “the efforts of a person’s seeking do not result in the Lord being found. Rather, the Lord has [already] set himself before his people and calls them to open their eyes – to see him as he is there, near to them.” [Grobien, *CPR*, 24:4, 13] He is already walking about in the Garden in search of you.

Which is exactly what Jesus [aka the owner of the vineyard] does in our Gospel reading today. Yes, He does more than issue forth the call. No, He himself goes out, seeking the very ones He graciously invites. It’s something He has been doing since Eden ... and is still doing through those who answer the call to “Go” in His name to “make disciples.” [Matthew 28:18-20] Bringing His Word to bear in the lives of those who are “*helpless and harassed* [like us],” in need of compassion, in need of a shepherd.

There is no law here ... only grace’s call.

“God uses the ‘imperatives’ not to emphasize what we must do, but to spread before us the table laden with His feast of salvation and to invite us to partake. In a similar way, a generous host may invite his guests to enter his dining room and enjoy a meal. The host, too, uses imperatives, but his purpose is to welcome and invite, not to demand.” [Eickmann, *CJ*, July 1987, 270]

Here, God is turning toward you, not only with your joyful return in full view, but also new life *now*! Yes, all the while seeking us, He can be found now. He is near now! [Adapted from Westerman, *Isaiah 40-66*, 287] Even in – and especially so – “in the face of turmoil and affliction.” [Grobien, 14]

All so that we might be ... ASSURED.

**... *That he may have compassion on him* [i.e. us], *and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.***

I so need my heavenly Father's gracious pardon. Wherein, to stand in view of where our life began, to hear God's Word that our sins are forgiven, to be reassured of the same through prophets and parables, and then ... the *coup de grace* – to partake of Him in the gifts He offers, what more assurances do we need? What greater assurances could He give?<sup>1</sup>

But it hard to see, at times, isn't it? And I can hardly believe it myself sometimes. For such gift of grace is most certainly not the way of the world.

EARTH, WIND & FIRE: “Child is born with a heart of gold; way of the world, makes his heart grow cold ... that's the way of the world.”

“No grace here!” Keeping records and accounts of our failures ... that's the world's way. Emphasizing calculation ... lashing out in vengeance ... expressing, at times, envy or resentment at such a display of grace ... or worse, insulting the Giver of grace Himself. [Thomas, *CJ*, July 1999, 310]

But that is *not* God's way ...

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<sup>1</sup> “Through His invitation, God assures us of His ‘being found,’ of His ‘being near’ [v. 6], and effects the ‘return’ [v. 7] of which He speaks. ... He makes plain that we, for Christ's sake, have been delivered from all our troubles of wickedness and evil.” [Eickmann, *CJ*, July 1987, 270]

**<sup>8</sup> For my thoughts are not your thoughts** [“works, calculated compensation” <sup>2</sup>], **neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.** **<sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.**

God’s way emphasizes grace, mercy and pardon ... coming at great cost to the Lord of heaven and earth Himself. [Thomas, 310]

Which doesn’t make sense ... except to the one on the receiving end of it. Where we don’t get what we truly deserve, but rather, get what we don’t – namely His grace and favor. Here, in God’s economy, no one gets less than he/she is promised, with many ending up getting more than they deserve. Where, on both accounts, it’s completely fair. For, in the end, God gets what He desires – that His children get to come home.

Thus invited ... and assured, we are also ... SUSTAINED.

*<sup>10</sup> “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, <sup>11</sup> so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”*

Indeed ...

*“The Word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,’ that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming.” [Romans 10:8]*

More than ever ... in all situations and circumstances ... whether in good times or bad ... we get to “call on Him.”<sup>3</sup>

 In repentance: God graciously invites us to return to Him, week after week, day after day ... even hourly. This very invitation is at the heart of God.

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas, *CJ*, July 1999, 309

<sup>3</sup> The following points are adapted from Martin, *CPR*, 12:4, 17.

✚ In faith: confession's better part, where, sorrow over sin means nothing without faith in God's Word of forgiveness in Christ ... whose brings forth the best part – forgiveness!

Leading us to call upon Him ...

✚ In prayer.

*“Call upon me in the day of trouble [trial or temptation]; I will deliver you, and you will honor Me.” [Psalm 50:5]*

Wherein, accepting His invitation, reveling in His assurances, and finding sustenance in His gifts ...

*<sup>12</sup> “You shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. <sup>13</sup> Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make ... an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”*

This is what grace can do ... accomplishing in you, even now, what the Lord would accomplish! Life in *His* name!

### **Conclusion**

*“Grace is everywhere.”*

[Bernanos, 298]

“Some suffer longer under Yahweh’s chastening yoke. Others have an easier path. Yet mercy is the final word for his people.” [Eggers, 251] Indeed, we are not left to an uncertain outcome. Where, the will and power to live resides in God’s gracious invitation to us ... in His assurances of life and salvation in His name.

SOUGHT IN GRACE, KEPT BY GRACE, GRACE NOW FINDS A HOME.

Rejoice, today, that it has found a home in you.

*Amen.*

[T] <sup>6</sup> “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; <sup>7</sup> let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

Such is the Word of the Lord from Isaiah 55:6-7, part of our Old Testament reading for this coming Sunday. Where, as is the typical approach to our readings in worship each week, there is usually a theme that ties the Old Testament, Psalm and Gospel readings together. The Epistle reading may also correspond at times, but not always. Just an FYI.

Where, as I entered into the chapel this past Monday to discern the Lord’s direction for this week’s sermon, a theme quickly emerged. Let’s read vv. 6-7 again, and if you wish to pause this recording, read all the way through v. 11. But let me get your thoughts ... as it were, let put you on the case.

<sup>6</sup> “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; <sup>7</sup> let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

I don’t know about you, but I immediately zeroed in on the latter half of v. 7 ... a verse that screams “God’s grace.” Where, picking up where we left off in last week’s message, this is God’s answer to the 70 x 7 equation. That one who truly seeks the Lord and the forgiveness that He offers, will never be turned away. That’s right ... you heard it here ... *every* confessed sin results in a Word of forgiveness from the Lord. Did you get that? “*Every* confessed sin!” Yes, search the Scriptures. See if this is not true. That *every* time *any* soul approached the throne of God in humility, and asked for the heavenly Father’s forgiveness, that soul was *never* turned away. That’s right. There is no confessed sin in all of Scripture that was not met with God’s solid declaration: “Go thy way. Thy sins are forgiven thee ... full and free!”

Unbelievable ... right? Far-fetched, I know. Astonishing some might say. Preposterous, others. Unlikely. How about you?

Ron Lee Davies, in his book *A Forgiving God in an Unforgiving World*, relates the story of a certain priest in the Philippines, a much-loved man of God who carried the burden of a secret sin he had committed many years before. He had repented but still had no peace, no sense of God's forgiveness. Where, in his parish was a woman who deeply loved God, and who claimed to have visions in which she spoke with Christ and He with her. The priest, however, was skeptical. So in order to test her he said, "The next time you speak with Christ, I want you to ask him what sin your priest committed while he was in seminary."

A few days later the priest asked, "Well, did Christ visit you in your dreams?"

"Yes, he did," she replied.

"And did you ask him what sin I committed in seminary?"

"Yes."

"Well, what did he say?"

"He said, 'I don't remember.'"

Child of God, I know it's hard to believe. That confessed sin simply dissipates and disappears into nothingness, when laid at the throne of God. How can this be? Because of another "throne" upon which hung the King of Glory, who with His last dying breath declared it to be so. Wherein, after the Savior speaks His Word of forgiveness, no more *need* be done to be assured of what He graciously gives. Where, it is *not* true: "what God forgives, he forgets." What *is* true – acc. to Isaiah's counterpart Jeremiah: "*I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*"

Yes, if the Lord of the universe consciously takes the time and chooses not to remember what it is you've done, go ahead and apply some of His "divine amnesia" to yourself. Where with enough sin to go around and confess, no need to add the doubt of His grace to the list. Of course, He'd forgive that, too! But He'd rather you simply take His gift ... and run!