

"FLOODING PEOPLE WITH THE GRACE OF GOD"

Romans 8:31-39 (Mark 9:36-37; Matthew 25:35, 40)

As children we all learned the children's nursery rhyme, "Humpty Dumpty." And we all know that Humpty Dumpty had an unsolvable problem, don't we? Well, guess what? We have a problem too, but ours has a solution.

Jesus Christ came to our wall,
Jesus Christ died for our fall,
So that regardless of death and in spite of sin,
Through grace, He might put us together again.
Author unknown

Isn't it reassuring to know that in this broken world in which we live, that in this broken world made up of broken people that Jesus came to set us right, to put us together again, all because of His grace, love and mercy?

When you think about the Grace of God what comes to your mind: forgiveness of sins, salvation? I wonder, how do you envision the Grace of God? Think of it this way- "When a person works an eight-hour day and receives a fair day's pay for his time, that is a wage.

When a person competes with an opponent and receives a trophy for his performance, that is a prize. When a person receives appropriate recognition for their long service or high achievements, that is an award.

But when a person is not capable of earning a wage, can win no prize, and deserves no award--yet receives such a gift anyway--that is a good picture of God's unmerited favor. This is what we mean when we talk about the grace of God." G.W. Knight, Clip-Art Features for Church Newsletters, p. 53.

This morning I want to focus on two words today- **Grace** and **Hospitality**. As we seek to flood people with the Good News of the wonderful grace of God by telling them about a God who truly loves them and cares for them, we need to also keep in mind of ways that we can put those words into action, by offering hospitality to those we encounter both inside and outside the church. And the **one word that I would suggest that bridges Grace and Hospitality is KINDNESS**.

And isn't that exactly what God exhibits to us through His amazing Grace- aka (**also known as**) kindness? Think about this- That God would, out of His amazing grace, send His only Son to die for me, to die for you, is sort of mind-boggling, is it not? And because we are the recipients of God's grace we should want to spread that grace around, better yet flood others with the grace of God and one of the ways we can do this, wouldn't you agree, is through acts of Hospitality- aka kindness?

One scholar said that Romans 8 is, "supremely Paul's chapter on the surety of God's grace." As a matter of fact, found in this passage is one of the most comforting NO's in all of scripture. For when Paul asks all of his questions like, "IF God is for us, who is against us?" And, "Who is to condemn?" And, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" And then he asks, "Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" He says with all certainty, a loud and resounding "NO!" For nothing can separate us from the love of God. This brings it all back to

the grace of God, the kindness of God.... And if God, out of His wonderful grace and kindness, out of his amazing love saved me, saved you, don't we want to share this amazing news with others? Don't we want to flood others with the grace of God?

Jesus had a habit of sharing the grace of God, the kindness of God with others. In the passage from Mark, Jesus spoke about the person who first needs to have a servant's heart and be willing to be selfless for the sake of others; they must be willing to welcome the helpless child, whom Jesus held up as an example to welcoming the person who is in need- the poor, the average Joe or Jane, the person who holds no power or influence. Jesus had a habit of eating with people who weren't the high society people, the religious leaders of the day but the common, ordinary people who needed His help. And that is why Jesus said what He did in Matthew 25:35 & 40, "for I was hungry and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me...."

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family [or my brothers or sisters], you did it to me.”

Before any of us started coming to this church on any regular basis those first few times we came in we were outsiders, we were strangers.

Someway, somehow we walked into this church- maybe because someone invited us, or we heard about a particular ministry going on, or maybe we came because we needed support in one way or another. Maybe we just showed up, “cold turkey” because of a, let me call it, a “heavenly nudge.”

But we came. I came here as the pastor some 16 years ago not because I wanted to leave my home area in western Pennsylvania but because of a heavenly nudge and I saw something special here- I saw the love of Christ and people reaching out to others in the name of Christ.

When we reach out others and share the grace of God, when we share hospitality with someone else, we share the love and kindness of God. But the issue is **how can we share the love of God, how can we share the**

kindness of God through intentional hospitality? In his book, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, Robert Schnase, a Bishop in the United Methodist Church, defines Christian hospitality as, "the active desire to invite, welcome, receive, and care for those who are strangers so that they find a spiritual home and discover for themselves the unending richness of life in Christ. It describes a genuine love for others who are not yet a part of the faith community, an outward focus, a reaching out to those not yet known, a love that motivates church members to openness and adaptability, a willingness to change behaviors in order to accommodate the needs and receive the talents of newcomers. Beyond intention, hospitality practices the gracious love of Christ, respects the dignity of others, and expresses God's invitation to others, not our own." (p.12) Believe it or not, whether you have been coming to this church for a long time or just a short time or maybe just today, we too, were, at one time, strangers- strangers to the faith, strangers to the church, strangers to each other.

And if we have become a part of this church then we have become a part of the Body of Christ, the church. But just think about the person who walks in for the first time or for the first few times. Think about the person who comes for the first time, maybe all by themselves and you notice them out of the corner of your eye and have this look of being lost. Or maybe it is the woman who comes with a child and they are looking around thinking, "where is the childcare? Where do I take my child during worship, let alone where is the bathroom?" What would the loving kindness of God, what would Godly hospitality look like for this woman and her child? It's being attuned that she is new and that she might need help and so we offer a helping hand by asking if we could assist her and her child. But who is to do this reaching out? Why of course, the pastor, or the person on staff? I mean, that is what they get paid to do, right? Wrong. It's the greeter who can reach out, it is the usher who is looking around for someone to help, it is any one of us who seeks to welcome and reach out to someone else with the love and

kindness of Christ. It is making hospitality a part of the life and culture of the church that sets forth a warm, inviting atmosphere that would make the first time or the 10th time visitor want to come back and be a part of the fellowship. And ways we can become engaged in hospitality in our church is to be on a Hospitality Team or to be on an Ushering team, or a Worship Host or Greeter, or involved in the Nursery or Children's Ministry that reaches out to the youth during worship. And if you come to the 9:00 service you could volunteer to serve the 11:15 a.m. service; and if you come to the 11:15 service you could volunteer at the 9:00 service. And even if you do not officially become involved in one of these areas that we are trying to enhance or create you can be hospitable to those who sit near you, it is inviting people to join in a class with you or a ministry with you, because Hospitality is a mindset, it becomes part of the culture that needs to be on-going and relevant. Many times it is doing the little things that become the big things.

It's finding out that the person you are talking to has an aging parent who is struggling and you say you are going to pray for that person and, more than that, you actually pick up the phone the next week and call them to "just check in on them." Friends, people have a need to belong; they want to belong to something; they have a need to be needed. I mean, I do, don't you too? And people who are searching for a church want a place where they are made to feel welcomed and loved, a place where they feel accepted because they feel God through us. And if you are not sure about God or the Church, that's OK. Come back next week and keep searching and asking.

Folks, we are talking this way because we want to flood Akron with the Love, the Grace, the kindness of God and people need to know that God loves them and is there for them in the difficult times as well as the joyous times. So Christ wants us to be His hands, His feet, His mind, His heart. He wants it from me, He wants it from you. Amen.

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Romans 8:31-39; Mark 9:36-37; Matthew 25:35, 40

Introduction: The children's nursery rhyme "Humpty Dumpty" and the unsolvable problem

What comes to mind when you think of the Grace of God?

Focusing on two words: _____ & _____
The word that bridges the two is _____

Romans 8:31-29

Mark 9:36-37

Matthew 25:35, 40

We were once outsiders, strangers

How can we share the love of God?

Hospitality is, "the active desire to invite, welcome, receive, and care for those who are strangers so that they find a spiritual home and discover for themselves the unending richness of life in Christ."

Bishop Robert Schnase, United Methodist Church

Ways we can become engaged...

Conclusion: Why are we talking this way? Because we want to flood Akron with the Love, Grace and Kindness of God, and people need to know that God loves them.