

Chris Murphy
January 28, 2024
Scripture: John 1: 1-5
Sermon Title: Original Grace

Prayer...

Introduction:

It was about this time six years ago, that I was introduced as the new pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Newberg. It was a special day for our family. During my first year with our church, I invited the Session leadership to help create a new mission statement. We eventually came up with the mission that we are a Christ centered church of grace, hope, and love committed to mission in Newberg and throughout the world. The word grace was chosen as part of the mission statement because session members described our church as a place of grace where people are warmly welcomed just as they are. In other words, it is okay to not be okay at this church. Part of the definition of grace is understanding that we are vulnerable people who need kindness,

forgiveness, and support always. Grace in the Koine Greek is Charis. It means God's unmerited favor, but may also refer to God's active love, mercy, and the power to overcome.

I have always loved the word grace, so much so that Karen and I gave our daughter Chiara the middle name of grace. For the next three Sundays, I want to reflect on this word with you. I want to share about grace in three ways. Today, we will explore Original grace and how grace is shown as an inherent goodness in all creation including us human beings, because Jesus Christ was present in the creation of the world and the Spirit of Christ is present still in each human being. As the Quakers remind us, the light of Christ is in each person.

Next week, we will reflect on what I am going to call Forgiving Grace.

This is the classic definition of grace and the forgiveness of Christ offered to us in our weakness, which includes our sinful condition. We will finish our brief series on grace when we celebrate Transfiguration

Sunday on Feb. 11th and highlight that grace is what transforms us into the image of Jesus Christ.

(My Story of Ignatian Spirituality and Doing the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises-Highlighting that I needed meditate on God as love and as creator before I could explore the reality of sin.)

Some Catholics and other folks who believe in Creation Spirituality or Celtic Spirituality highlight the idea of Original Grace, or Original Blessing. This is a counter perspective from the common view of Original Sin.

The perspective of original grace is that the deepest part of every person and really all of creation is the sacred presence of Christ. Celtic Spirituality writer, John Philip Newell in his book Sacred Earth, Sacred Soul explains this truth.

He writes, "In Celtic wisdom we remember that our soul, the very heart of our being, is sacred. What is deepest in us is of God. Every child, every woman, every man, and every life-form is in essence divine."

If you are like me, you may find this statement new and a little surprising. I was taught growing up in a presbyterian church that what was deepest in every person was actually sin, which was why we needed the grace of Jesus in the first place. This perspective is still more common than what I am sharing with you today and next week we will talk more about the reality of sin as part of the human condition, but I need to be honest with you all that I am a convert to the idea that what is deepest in every person and all of creation is actually the sacred presence of the divine.

Our Scripture passage today from the Gospel of John chapter 1 says,

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life,[a] and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

Do you hear what this passage is saying? It is saying that the capital W Word was with God in the beginning. The Apostle John is talking about Jesus before he became human. He was with God in the beginning.

Then John says that All things came into being through Jesus Christ. Like God our Father and Mother and the Holy Spirit, Jesus is also revealed as Creator of the Cosmos. Then hear the truth of these words. Jesus is described as the one who brings life and light to all people and that this light overcomes the darkness.

I think in this passage we have a Scriptural and theological basis for believing that at the heart of God's creation is the light and life of Christ Himself.

This then is one text we can go to that helps us understand that every person is imbued with the presence of Christ literally in their DNA because everything that came into being was through Christ in partnership with the other members of the Trinity. Why is this important?

I have shared before with you that a few years ago when I started to learn this truth of Original Grace or Original Goodness, I started asking Christian family and friends whether they believed they were good or bad on the inside. I remember asking one relative and he said that he thought inside he was bad. I told him that I understood this perspective but that I believed that deep down he was actually good because of the grace that is in us all through Christ.

So, I ask you, when you think about yourself, or others is your instinct to think of inherent goodness or badness. Why is it important?

Three reasons: Why three. Because I am presbyterian. We like three points.

1. I believe Jesus wants us to love ourselves and see ourselves as connected to him not only because of forgiveness, which is great, but because he want us to see ourselves as worthy of his love just

because we are his children. To me this is at the heart of what every parent wants a kid to feel about herself or himself. We want our children to have self-love and self-esteem. And remember self-love is different than selfishness or self-centeredness. So reason one to believe that deepest in us is original grace or goodness is that this is what Jesus Christ want us to see in ourselves.

2. I know that there are a few therapists in this congregation and quite a few members of this congregation who have benefitted from therapy or spiritual direction. In the fields of psychological counseling and spiritual direction, it is becoming more common for people to understand that positive self-image is important to good mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health. I believe positive psychology and more positive perspectives on humanity as a whole are helpful in our day, especially since so many people are suffering from woundedness caused by an overemphasis on sin and shame. Yes, we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. In

that sense we are sinners, but I believe we are also saints and we need to see ourselves through the lens of Jesus who is not at all intimidated by our sin and who sees our beauty and goodness as a deeper truth. Jesus sees his very presence in each and every person. Even those who have not yet received him as Lord and Savior. Since Christ sees himself in every person because he created them, then we too should look on every person as a child of God who carries the light of Christ within. This means that when we come to know Christ, we are restored to who we already are created to be deep down. We are restored to our true nature as beloved children of God.

3. A final reason why I love the idea of original grace is that this perspective changes everything about how we see the world. It is easy to look at the world and see the bad things that are happening. It is common for people to highlight the corruption and violence that pervade society. I get it. There is a ton of evil. But for me the wisest people are not overcome by the darkness

but rather the light of Christ dwells in them so richly that life is viewed more from a perspective of inherent goodness and grace.

For me the most enlightened people are the ones who see a world filled with light, love, and beauty, who see in even the most hardened people a hope for healing and a sign of God's presence within.

Most people who know me know that I am a fairly positive person. You can blame my parents for raising me in a positive environment full of love and light, but even though I am a positive person I have struggled in different seasons of my life with feelings of self-rejection and shame. For me this newer theology that emphasizes the goodness of myself and others is life changing. This perspective allows me to embrace the goodness of others and to be more forgiving and understanding.

Every Sunday as we begin the service, I remind you that God is love and God loves you. I also remind you that you are love and that you are created in the image of God. Friends, the truth is we were born with

grace in our DNA. Grace is Jesus Christ personified. It is the presence of empowering love that is rooted in our DNA. We have the light of Christ within and like Christ any darkness within has not overcome our beauty and goodness. Praise be to God our Mother and Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. AMEN