

Wednesday, March 21, 2018 – Lent Midweek VI
“Graced Toward Glory”

1 Peter 5: 6-11

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Calling Us Home – CSL Series

Definition Structure

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

You’ve caught it, I’m sure. Our midweek Lenten services have a clear theme, God is calling us home. Sometimes in life we hear that call loud and clear. Other times, maybe most times, the call home seems distant, but we still hear it. Since we hear God’s call, we know there’s a goal before us, a goal to reach in the future. St. Peter says that the goal is the salvation of our souls (1 Peter 1:9). Now the word “salvation” is church jargon. It’s one of those words we throw around in church but what does it really mean? “Salvation” simply means being rescued and brought safely home. One day church services and hearing the call will be over. Through faith we know that Jesus rescues us, saves us. So one day we’ll arrive safely home, safe with God for all eternity. Are we there yet? No, kids, not yet. So we think of these days as, here’s some more jargon, the “time of grace.” “Time of grace” simply means we need all the help, all the grace we can get from our God and Savior if we’re going to arrive safely in our true home. As this evening’s sermon title puts it, we are “Graced toward Glory.”

To arrive safely home, we need all the grace we can get! Grace is the favor that God gives you and me because of Jesus Christ. It’s the opposite of works, which you’ve heard many times cannot save you. Grace is the favor God gives sorry, repentant sinners because of all that our Savior has done for us. St. Peter talked about grace several times as he wrote to encourage Christians on their way home. “Grace and peace be multiplied to you,” in 1:2. “Multiplied,” he said; he prayed lots and lots of grace upon them and upon us. The Old Testament prophets prophesied about the grace you and I hear, 1:10. God’s great favor, His grace, will be manifest when Jesus Christ comes at the end of time, 1:13. When we endure unjust suffering, that’s also a grace from God. He enables us to bear suffering for being Christian and not retaliate, 1:19–20. In 3:7 Peter says husbands and wives are heirs of the grace of life. In 4:10 the various ways we serve in church demonstrate God’s varied grace. God gives grace to the humble, 5:5, and in tonight’s text God is called “the God of all grace.” Peter is big on grace! Through Jesus Christ

God has lots of grace for you and me, and, as I said, we need it! We really are living in a “time of grace.”

Our text this evening list four qualities for you and me to develop as we are graced toward glory. The first is humility. Since God shows his favor upon the humble, Peter says, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.” The world doesn’t consider humility to be sophisticated. St. Peter always struggled with humility. When Jesus predicted that all his disciples would leave him, Peter boasted he would never abandon Jesus. How did that turn out? But at other times Peter was humbly dependent on Jesus. When many people left Jesus, Peter said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68) Heavenly Father, give us your favor so that we see ourselves as You see us, sinners more than we know, but graced toward eternal glory more than we can ever imagine.

Second, our text says cast “. . . all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.” The world doesn’t encourage us to admit our weaknesses and worries. St. Peter struggled with prayer; many of us struggle but Jesus was tight in prayer with his Father. We see that most clearly in the garden of Gethsemane. But Peter? Jesus told Peter and the other disciples to watch and pray but they fell asleep. “The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matthew 26:41) Jesus said, “Sleep and take your rest later on.” (Matthew 26:45) Heavenly Father, grace us with a spirit of unceasing prayer so that every anxiety prompts us to pray to You.

Third, our text warns us to “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith.” The sophisticates of American culture don’t believe in the devil. No doubt that’s just what the devil wants people to believe. St. Peter learned that the devil is insidiously real. When Jesus predicted his suffering and crucifixion, Peter, the Bible tells us, “took him aside and began to rebuke him.” (Mark 8:32) Jesus said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” (Mark 8:33) Heavenly Father, help us to know that the old wily foe now means deadly woe. Give us grace us to resist him firm in faith so that we soon will arrive safely in glory.

And fourth and finally from tonight's text is a jab against American individualism. "Resist him (the devil), firm in your faith" (I just talked about that), "knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world." American individualism is not all bad but I'm not the center of the universe and neither are you. We are together, we are church, and we are members of the Body of Christ journeying toward salvation. St. Peter knew that. He was probably in Rome when he wrote this epistle but his mind was on the whole Christian church, especially those brothers and sisters in Asia Minor, what we call Turkey. They were being shunned and slandered for following Jesus. Heavenly Father, grace us with a sense of the worldwide church, its joys and sufferings, as you call us all toward glory.

In our passion reading this evening we heard of Jesus' crucifixion, death and burial. We heard that passion history knowing that glory was going to break forth from the tomb three days later. That's our life. We died with Christ by baptism into death, now we daily rise to newness of life in this time of grace, and we believe that one day we will be resurrected with Jesus. Until that day, until the goal of salvation is achieved and we are brought safely home, until then, we need all the grace we can get!

A common hymn that we sing at funerals, "Abide With Me" puts it this way:

I need thy presence every passing hour;
What but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who like myself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me.

(Lutheran Service Book, 878, 2)

Rev. Arnold Kunz, a pastor who died last year and once served as the District President in our district, once put it this way. "Life narrows down." Don't you know that's the truth! "Life narrows down and there, in the narrow place, stands Jesus." "To Him be the dominion forever and ever. In Jesus' name, Amen."