

Sunday, June 10, 2018 – Third Sunday after Pentecost
“So That Grace...”

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

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Process

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

Life sure has a whole lot of change, doesn't it? And we also know that change is hard. Systems – government, workplaces, churches, families, your own body – do everything they can to reach homeostasis – a comfortable set-point, consistency, no surprises. We want stability, predictability, order – and change upsets that order. Change upsets people. Change makes us adapt. Change is often painful. I recently heard it said this way, “people don't hate change as much as they hate the loss that change brings.” So life has lots of changes and changes involve loss – life and change and loss are all tangled up together – that's why it's stressful to move, or go to a new school, or get married, or have a baby, or get a new boss, or upgrade your software and have to learn everything all over again, or hear a difficult diagnosis, or lose a loved one. Note that I mixed some positive and negative experiences together on that list. That was on purpose. Most knee-jerk reactions to any change, even when it's a really positive change, involves fear and a sense of loss. I mean, be honest – were any parents out there NOT afraid for the sake of their child, their own readiness to parent? Has any parent never felt resentment at lack of sleep, never tripped over disagreements that didn't used to exist with your spouse on account of this new person or people in your house? Experienced loss of time and the types of dates or vacations you used to have? That great, beautiful, you'd never give it up change in your life, also known as that child of yours... is hard, not because it's bad but because even very good change involves fear and loss.

But you know, it's being honest about that, owning that loss, that fear, that change that sets us up for something even better. Over these next five weeks we'll be in 2 Corinthians, a letter Paul wrote to a small little church in Corinth (a large, wealthy, multicultural, cosmopolitan port city in Greece). This hodgepodge collection of new converts were struggling through the change of what it was to have a different kind of life and a different kind of hope as a Christian than they, or anyone in their culture had ever had before. And what we see today and each of the next five weeks is the liberal outpouring of pure, undeserved grace.

Now grace is one of those words that Christians throw around a lot and a lot of people don't really know what it means. Grace is simply an unexpected, undeserved gift. We'll let the apostle Paul walk us through various losses, fears and changes, asking us to face reality honestly and responsibly so that grace can be spoken into us. See, grace is unexpected, undeserved. Grace by its very definition is not available to someone who is expectant or deserving. If someone is expectant or deserving we don't call it a gift – we call it a reward, or a paycheck, or an award, or commendation. It's earned. Not so with grace. No, grace presumes a real loss, a reason to fear, and a lot of that painful change – that pain, that loss, makes you aware of your need for grace that you can't earn for yourself.

Paul says we believe, therefore we speak. Believe in what, speak of what? We believe in what God says about His answer to the change, the fear, the losses. Oh, I know, the temptation is to resist, pull back on change, hide it away, and compel everyone else around you not to rock the boat either, keep things safe and comfortable and stable and predictable and orderly – but like being tossed around in the ocean, change will grab us whether we're ready or not.

The losses make us aware of our need. Some losses are things that happen to us. A freak accident. A sudden heart attack. A natural disaster. A cruel, crushing word from someone else for no good reason. Our fears make us aware of our need – our inadequacies. Our lack of control to keep things in homeostasis. A market crash and the close of our workplace. An abusive spouse or parent. And then there are the times... the many, many times daily times... that we bring things on ourselves – a friendship soured by inattention. Failure to come through on a commitment. Jealous thoughts, mean words. These losses that happen to us, fears that make us aware of our need and most especially the things we think, say and do set us up to see something critically important – we need something that we can't earn and don't deserve. We believe God's answer, Jesus who was raised from the dead and through whom we too are promised to be raised when we die.

And then we speak – we speak of an eternal hope to a world full of people no different than you and me... starting with your spouse and your children, and in your extended family and neighborhoods, your workplaces and schools, your church family and the rest of the community. There is great loss and great fear rampant all over the world, wrought by change and an

uncertain future. Many are frantically searching for something stable in which to hope, or striving to earn a modicum of certainty and control, but every answer out there – enough wealth to be comfortable, enough health to live long and pain-free, enough honor and favor to be respected, enough organization and predictability to be safe – all of it is fleeting and best, and fool's gold at worst.

The temptation is to lose heart... which is why we speak what we believe – about Jesus, about His resurrection for us, about our resurrection at the end – to encourage each other and share the message with a world struggling for security in all the wrong places, so that more and more people would be reached with the news of an undeserved, unexpected gift of grace from God in Jesus, and more and more voices crying out with thanksgiving to the glory of God.

Yes life involves change and change involves fear and loss – but we believe and speak of One who does not change, who faced our greatest fear and lived lost the greatest loss of all in His death for the sin of the world, all motivated by His earning all the security the world can never give us. Jesus earns victory and shares it, undeserved and unexpectedly with you and me and we call it grace.

I know life is hard. A pet peeve for me is people jumping in too quickly to try to make it sound better, minimize the hardships, gloss over the pain – but grace puts all that change life brings in a new, higher, eternal perspective. It won't last forever. We believe, we speak, of a reality that is unseen beyond all the change and loss and fear – a new home, reality and even body that God is building for you and me. We believe, and we speak of Jesus, the graceful gift-giver. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.