

GOD'S GRACE IS ASCRIBED TO HIS PEOPLE

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

This year, on this day, a day ahead of the actual date, this congregation marks the thirty-fourth year of her chartering through God's grace. Throughout that time, God has consistently given His mercy to call sinners to repentance through His Word and Sacraments at Catalina Lutheran Church. We also mark the 499th year of grace which has flowed into, over, and through God's congregations of the Reformation. Such are fitting in this division of the year which is given to recall our struggle with Satan.

God's grace is ascribed, imputed, to those who hear and believe in the Good News of Jesus' death which covers over our sins. His resurrection which declares us right with the Father is proclaimed that we might ever remember He has bound Satan. We are free to rejoice in the grace of God which covers us and spares us from the wrath of God, sins, death, and hell by His blood. Those who regularly receive God's gifts here know that phrase. It is declared when?

Each time the Lord's Supper is celebrated among us, we are reminded that He has saved us from those four earthly, heavenly, and eternal realities. That message is ours to proclaim in a world that, for the younger generations, is becoming aware, as were the ancients, that this world is not all there is to life. It is a visual, aural, and olfactory reminder that God is the God of mercy. Whenever we see the chalice and host lifted up, whenever we hear Jesus' Words of Institution, whenever we smell the

consecrated wine, and taste the hosts, we behold God's mercy.

But, even before that wonderful mystery, when we enter the Nave and lift up our eyes, we behold images which remind us of God's mercy. Over the past thirty-four years, from the "temporary" building which stood for more than a quarter century, to this building, and into that which appears to be coming, God's people have given, and received, images of God's grace for use in this place. Such are helpful, as they depict the Word of God in ways which call to our minds that which happened long ago, but still continues today. Hear and reflect again on this section from today's reading lifted from the Letter to the Romans about:

all [who have] have sinned and fail to reach the glory of God, continually being justified freely (as a gift) by His grace through the redemption, the one in Christ Jesus; Whom God set forth publicly as propitiation on account of [the] Faith, in the Blood of Him, for [the] demonstration of the righteousness of Him, through the passing over the previously committed sins.¹

There is a lot packed into that relatively short teaching about those who are of the Faith of Christ Jesus. It holds encouragement for us when we behold, that is, hear, smell, touch, taste, and see things in the Church before, during and immediately after the Lord's Service to us. It is by design that the central Word you hear is that of God's forgiveness in Christ. It is with intent that you smell the cut flowers in the Chancel – they are given to remind us of the beauty, fragility, and shortness of mortal life. On the Great Feasts, it is by choice that you may inhale the fragrance of the incense which recalls the prayers of the faithful which ascend before God day and

¹ Romans 3:24-25.

night. It is with intent that the font is placed where you might touch the plain water, and remember that God has saved you through the Flood of His washing and regeneration. It is God's design that those whom He has called to partake of His Sacrament smell and taste the fruits of His passion from His Table. It is by plan that the image, once you enter the doors to this Nave, all the way to the moment when you receive God's Benediction and Blessing, that the picture of God's grace stands to center your attention is the Lord's Table.

That central icon, the Table, is placed that your eyes, thoughts, emotions – all your being – may be drawn to it. Think of its centrality, and how things are placed to draw your eyes to the Table, and God's gifts on it. At its very center, is the place which, in the Old Covenant, would be known as the *ιλαστεριον* [often translated, "Mercy Seat"]. There, as the forty percent of you who attend Sunday Adult Bible classes have repeatedly heard, is where the High Priest would, pour out the blood of a bull and a goat.

Now, as Pastor Palmer has been doing a yeoman's job of covering the Old Covenant sacrifices, we shall not go in depth now to hear of that which happened every year on *Yom Kippur*, "the Day of Atonement." Suffice it to say that, the *ιλαστεριον* [the "Mercy Seat"] of old was where the incense would flow, the blood of the sacrifices would be poured out. Annual atonement would be offered for the sins of the High Priest, his household, and the whole people of God.

In the center of the Most Holy Place, over the Ark of the Covenant while it

was still in the Tabernacle, and later, Temples of the Lord, was where the blood would provide a covering. When the Ark was stolen, or lost, or, as it was in the First Century A.D. with its whereabouts unknown, the blood would be dripped on the supporting stone over with the Old Covenant Ark had lain.

It was remembered by the people, even when the Lord had removed His Presence from them on account of their unrepentant sins, that the Ark had been the center of God's Presence among them. (cf. Anoint converts to Christianity through church at Rome (i.e. recipients of today's letter) at baptism and near death). They, the faithful remnant in every generation, could look toward the Most Holy Place. They could behold the gifts of God: hear the Word of the chanted Psalms; smell the incense of their repentant prayers; be touched by the blood cast upon them; taste the flesh of the sacrifices; and see the wonders of God in their midst. They would be able to know, believe, and feel that they were being saved by God from His wrath, sin, death, and hell by the blood of the sacrifices - which all pointed to the final Sacrifice, Christ our Lord.

With that in mind, direct your attention here, to the focal point of the Church gathered in Worship. On the Table, surrounded by images which bear light, stands the means of God's grace for His people. Centered, as we try to make them, are the Word, and the Vessels of the Sacrament of the Altar. There, the Word, which works the Faith of Christ in all believers, grants faith through the water imaged in the Baptismal Font, and lift up sinners to declare them saints, the Word stands as Gift.

The Table is flanked by the furniture used to proclaim God's Word. The Table is raised from the floor of the Nave. The Table is bracketed by images of our crucified Savior, and the Rose of teaching. It is accompanied by the places for the tableware, the prayers, the offerings. Eyes lifted up are drawn down from the cross, over the Tablets of the Law, to rest on the center: Word and Sacraments – God's gifts to call sinners to repentance, to remind them their sins are covered, and to feed them, you, with the food which gives the One True God. Hear again God's Word concerning all this:

Because out of works of Law no flesh will be justified before Him, for on account of Law (comes) intimate knowledge of sin - but apart from Law righteousness of God appeared, having been witnessed by the Law and the prophets.²

It is by design that the Tablets of the Law hang below the Instrument of His Propitiation for sinners and are suspended above the Table of the Lord's Mercy. Those are the pure Word of death for those who will to live before God in keeping them for salvation. They are overshadowed by the image of that which brought death to cover their demands. They remind us that, though we have been given an intimate knowledge of sin by reading, believing, and feeling their demands, we have been given the greater knowledge that we have been freed from all sins in Jesus' atoning death. They remind us to cling to the words of Scripture that declare of the sacrificial, atoning death of Jesus:

In the forbearance of God, with the demonstration of His righteousness in

² Romans 3:20-21.

*the now, to the One Who is just and justifier to the one from (the) faith of Jesus.*³

Look here, in the Faith. Behold the Word which declares your sin. See the Word which proclaims your justification, a legal decree, that your sins are no more. (Justice or Mercy? What do you prefer?) St. Paul says:

*For man (is) accounted (as) having been justified by faith apart from works of Law.*⁴

More Gospel here:

God's grace is imputed to those who hear and believe in the Good News of Jesus' death which covers over our sins. It brings the eternal news that His resurrection declares us right with the Father. It is the grace of God which covers us and spares us from the wrath of God, sins, death, and hell by His blood.

This year, on this day, we do mark the 499th year of grace which has flowed into, over, and through God's congregations of the Reformation. For congregations that claim the name, "Lutheran," plans for next year hold great portents for remembering the "Three Solas," the cry of the Reformation - Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Scripture Alone. God, through His grace, still grants His Faith, through the inspired Scripture that you might continue to believe that Jesus' blood covers your sins.

As we await that 500th anniversary, this congregation rejoices in remembering the thirty-fourth year of her chartering through God's grace. We give thanks that God has consistently given His Word, of His mercy, continually calling

³ Romans 3:26.

⁴ Romans 3:28.

sinners to repentance through His Word and Sacraments at Catalina Lutheran Church. Even as we struggle with the Satan, we look forward in joy to that which God might do in us, through His Faith, as this millennial congregation prepares for another year of His grace.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Reformation (One-year series)

Psalm 46; Revelation 14:6-7; Romans 3:19-28; Matthew 11:12-19

October 31, 2016

Pastor Michael L. Morhouse

Soli Deo Gloria

October 31, 1517

October 31, 1982