

CORE VALUE SERIES - GRACE OVER PERFORMANCE (2 of 4)

What kind of church do we want to be? What are our core values – that underpin our relationships? Last week I quoted Roy Disney's famous saying..." it's not hard to make decisions once you know what your values are!" We are in a series of four messages exploring what our core values are. Last week – We value relationships over tradition. Today – the second message of 4.... We value 'Grace over Performance.'

READING; John 8: 1-11, 2 Corinthians 12: 9, and Ephesians 2: 8-10.

Every morning on TV the commodities price is quoted as around the world prices for silver, gold and oil fluctuate with global trends and traumas....but there is a commodity that out prices them all – it's the commodity of grace – its cost is the blood of God. And this thing called 'grace' is that which marks Christianity and sets it apart from every other religion or spirituality in the world. Many religions have their gods or followers incarnated, some even resurrected to new life but it was CS Lewis who when asked – what makes Christianity different from every other – 'that's easy he replied – it's grace. No other has grace. The indiscriminate unconditional free gift of God you cannot earn, merit, or buy – the undeserved favour of God – for you. And having received this 'charis' gift of God you are to become a conduit or 'grace dispenser' to others... that's a good description of our core value today. We value 'grace over performance' in our relationships.

So if Grace is so amazing why don't we see more of it? Grace wouldn't be what most people outside the church say – when they comment on the church. We are not known for our dispensing of grace– often what we say and do looks more like 'un-grace'. Yet when we look at the life of Jesus it oozes grace. In our story, we read today's performance and judgment doesn't get a look in...grace does. And I don't know about you, but I want to belong to a church that dispenses grace and demonstrates grace-filled relationships. Whether we are talking about allocation of car parks, choosing worship songs, visiting traumatised people in hospital, or simply sitting with a hot drink and listening to someone's story – we are 'grace dispensers'-conduits of God's grace to each other. This morning I want to remind you of the *two faces* of Grace.....

1. SAVING GRACE – Ephesians 2: 8-10

The great Trade-off is that God forgives our sin and counts us as though we never sinned because of Christ's sacrifice. And here's why many people struggle with this concept, it's because it's so unbelievable!! Grace is a gift that costs the giver everything and the receiver nothing....and everything within us goes – surely I must need to do 'something' to be accepted by God?--

Do you remember the story of Babette's Feast – I spoke of some weeks ago? The feast cost those who ate nothing but it cost Babette everything she possessed.

And when it comes to saving grace – our minds cannot quite get our heads around this. There must be some performance, some way in which I qualify for this kind of benefit and favour? And the answer is – no you don't. There is NOTHING you can do to qualify yourself for God's saving grace or favour.... and here's the reason why.

Most of you here today are probably pretty good people. There are probably not too many of you who are adulterers, murderers, or child rapists here. But when we come to grace – and the issue of deserving of grace or not, if there were people who deserved, earned, or qualified for it – who would they be? Where would you draw the line? This is exactly the issue here in John 8 – those who gathered felt this woman should not qualify because of her lifestyle... but saving grace came to her. Clearly, the people who were about to stone her felt they lived cleaner and better lives and this woman deserved what was coming to her. And here's the thing about us – we somehow need to know where we fit on the ranking. You hear about it at funerals where apart from stories told of the person who has passed – often someone says something like, they lived a good life to the full and helped others. And that was their ranking – but none of this truly matters because we all deserve the kind of stoning this woman was facing. And it was to that Jesus drew the attention of those who were about to stone her.

Which person do you suppose God loves more – you or someone in Paremoro prison this morning doing time for murder or violent rape? Hardly a night on the news goes by without someone being jailed for some heinous crime. Something inside us goes – me I think because I live a pretty good life. And God goes – wrong answer. God's grace is offered not to the deserving but to those who deserve the opposite.... Regardless of their sin. And that is you and me.

He says – bring your life to me and exchange it for the life of my Son...living in you...and then dispense this same grace to others. To the woman at the well – Jesus does not condemn nor condone her lifestyle or choices – he simply says 'I sense you are thirsty for something' To the woman caught in adultery Jesus says – go sin no more. And to you this morning hearing my voice, the same amazing grace offer is made.

For we cannot boast about what we have not earned. We can take no credit for what has cost us nothing to secure. We do not deserve the great reward we have been offered.

For me, I'm a performance kind of guy, most of my life I have been very performance-driven. It's built into my DNA – if I succeed it's because of my hard effort, if I fail it's because I didn't work hard enough. Praise for a job well done is something I love to hear – because it reinforces my belief that my value is based upon what I can achieve and complete. It's been a long journey for me to realise that none of this is how God sees me. He loves me whether I succeed or not, whether I perform well or not. You see my problem is that often I don't feel deserving of being loved because I miss the mark. But God says to all my accusers – cast the first stone! And they all walked away starting with the eldest. Why? Because life experience and wisdom teach us that sin and failure come to us all in different shapes and sizes. And saving grace is not about success or failure, performance or effort. It's about who God is. Have you got through on that?

Now before we look at the second kind of grace, I want to say something about 'saving grace'. Many times we think of this as an event that occurs when we first believe, and this is true. But there is a saving grace that is *continuous*. I was saved, am being saved, and will be saved (kept) to the day of Christ's return. We need saving now as much as the first time we prayed a sinners prayer.

But there is a second kind of grace also... having received saving grace.... We now find grace to live and empower us for life...I've called it:

2. ENABLING GRACE – 2 Corinthians 12:9 "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me"

To face trials, tests, disappointments, temptation, and challenging lives. To forgive, to trust, grace-filled relationships that allow for 'others weaknesses and not judge'.

A couple of years ago I read the book *Frida – 'Chosen to die, Destined to Live'* It's the story of her life and struggle to forgive the genocide in Rwanda where everything in her family was wiped out....all her family, her grandparents, her parents, her sisters, and brothers, and she was left for dead in a pile of human remains. And she tries to put her life together again, which she does. But the big struggle comes when confronted to forgive those Hutus who had murdered her family; and trust in a God who had stood by and allowed this to happen. And she comes to this amazing conclusion. 'We forgive to heal ourselves firstly – to set the prisoner free and that prisoner is US!' God is our vindicator and issues of fairness and justice are His to determine.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12.9 "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. You can get through this. I will supply for you 'enabling grace' which will give you power to do the unthinkable, love the unlovable, forgive the unforgivable, and survive the challenging circumstances of your life. ***'Grace comes to us not we to it.'***

Why is it do you think Footsteps – connects and resonates with us so powerfully? Because....sometimes we need to be 'carried' by grace. Something within us even us, tough guys, know that we carry weaknesses, defects, and frailties that only God can pull us through. Our strength is not enough.

Enabling grace – is God's strength to get you past and over the line. And all God says to us is 'ask me – for it. CS Lewis says 'God gives where he finds empty hands'.

So what would the church look like where we valued grace over performance? – Where we all realised that there was no ranking of people who were God's favourites, or a preference for those who achieved and performed and contributed. Where every person young and old realised they could not change one iota of God's delight in them by anything they do... where we would find it easy to forgive each other's failures, celebrate each other's successes, encourage each other's endeavours.

Where age and stage of life had nothing to do with achievements and status but more to do with telling stories of God's enabling grace that keeps on saving. People are thirsty for that kind of love. And we are the *grace dispensers*.

One of the great privileges of being a pastor is being with people in times of desperation, crisis, illness, and death. People say some very interesting things in those moments when they know they are stretched beyond the limit or taking their final breath. And something always amazes me when I come away from sitting with people in these situations. Many of them don't talk about themselves – they talk about others, how's Judy – how's the church going? What's God doing in people's lives and among those you are around? There is this smell of grace about the conversation. And you come away feeling better for the time spent – and you realise that person has dispensed grace to you not so much you to them. Broken bodies, people in pain of heartache and disappointment, people with cancer-ridden bodies still dispensing grace.

The year was 1988, the place Wembley stadium, artists from around the world gathered to remember Nelson Mandela's 70th birthday. Over fifty different bands took part from Joe Cocker, Natalie Cole, Bee Gees, UB40, Whitney Houston, Stevie Wonder, Phil Collins, Dire Straits, and Eric Clapton....they all wowed the massive crowd to celebrate the end of apartheid in South Africa. The final act of the concert was Jesse

Norman, a black singer who stood before them all and began to sing unaccompanied 'Amazing Grace' - and that mass of humanity fell silent. Because God turned up and dispensed grace..... The World is thirsty for saving grace and enabling grace – and only we can give it.

You know, in music what a 'grace note' is – its name is actually 'charis' from the Greek word which means grace. And it's the little note that *brings focus onto the following note*. It's not the note that is to be focussed on – it's there but not there. A grace note....that is what you and I are to be. There but not there, and bringing the focus onto Jesus from you.

We value Relationships over Tradition

We value Grace over Performance

That's the kind of church the world wants to see. Not judgmental do-gooders but people who value grace over performance.