

Ephesians 2:4-10

Recently I've been thinking a lot about **changes**. In the 6 1/2 years that I have been serving the LORD here at First German, a **lot** of things have changed - including the **facilities** and **equipment** which we own, the **programs** which we use to carry out God's mission among us, a number of the **called workers**, and even many of the **members** themselves. A **lot** of things have changed - and I think that most of us would agree that although change is always **difficult** for people, **most** of the changes have been for the **better**. But in the midst of all these changes, one thing has **not** changed, and that is the **grace of God**. So this morning, on the basis of the text we have before us, we're going to take the opportunity to **Celebrate God's Grace**.

What is God's grace? How should we **define** it? Perhaps this is a little oversimplified, but I like to define grace as God's **undeserved love** for us. In order to really see how much that **means** to us, let's first of all look at what it meant to the **Ephesians** in our text. Earlier in his letter to them Paul wrote, "*You were **dead** in your transgressions and sins, in which you **used** to live when you followed the ways of this **world**.*" How did the Ephesians follow the ways of this **world**? Many of them had been practicing **sorcery** - they were involved in **witchcraft** and the **occult**. Ephesus was also the center of worship for the goddess **Artemis**, or **Diana**. Both sorcery and the worship of Diana were carried out because of the things which the people could gain for **themselves** by practicing them. Whether those things were **material** wealth, or **sexual** gratification, or **fame**, or **whatever**; the bottom line was that the Ephesians were **selfish** - they were only concerned about **themselves**. And Paul told them that this sinful, self-centered **attitude** followed by sinful, self-centered **actions**, had actually **killed** them spiritually. They were **dead** in transgressions and sins.

Now, you know how much a dead body is capable of **helping** itself, or anyone else. It is **incapable** of doing **anything**, even so much as lifting a finger, or wiggling a toe. How were these spiritually **dead** Ephesians going to get themselves out of the sinful **predicament** which they had made for themselves? Obviously, they **couldn't** do it - they couldn't do **anything**. But that's where **God's grace** came in. Our text begins, "*Because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us **alive** with Christ, even when we were **dead** in transgressions - it is by **grace** you have been saved.*" The Ephesians were in **big** trouble. They had **killed** themselves spiritually by turning toward **idols**, and by

turning away from the **true** God. But then - miracle or miracles - that same true God made them **alive** again through faith in **Christ**. The Ephesians **received** help, even though they didn't **deserve** it. It was by **grace** that the Ephesians had been saved.

It is my contention that the **Ephesians** were no more wicked or godless or selfish than **you** and **I** are. And all we have to do is **look** into our lives, and **listen** to ourselves, to know that it's **true**. Our lives today are greatly influenced by the **media**. Quite often what we **read** in newspapers and magazines, what we **hear** on the radio, and what we **see** on television and the internet becomes an integral part of the way we **act** and **live**. Unfortunately, the media are overflowing with **secular humanism**. They place **people** in the number one position of importance - a position which rightfully belongs to our **God** alone. Just to illustrate that, have you ever **listened** - I mean **really** listened - to some of today's **advertising**? It makes **you** the most important element in **everything**. "Dare to get the things **you** want" - "What **you** want is what **you** get" - "Be all that **you** can be" - and they go on and on. Is it any wonder then that our attitude often becomes **self-centered**? "What's in it for me? This is what **I** like, and this is what **I** want."

All too often, without even **thinking** about it, we get ourselves sucked into the **world's** way of thinking. We put **ourselves** first, and drop **God** into a relatively **low** place in our lives. We **openly** break God's commands because it's what we think **we want**. But in reality, that attitude **kills** us spiritually, just as it killed the **Ephesians**. By every human standard, God should throw the whole miserable selfish bunch of us into **hell**. But He **doesn't** - because God doesn't **operate** by human standards. Rather, as Paul tells us, "*It is by **grace** you have been saved, through **faith** - and this is **not** from yourselves, it is the gift of God - **not** by works, so that **no one** can boast.*" **God** raised us to **life** just as He raised the Ephesians. It was by **His grace alone**, through faith in **Jesus**. Our salvation is truly a **miracle** - a miracle which comes directly from the **love** which **God** has for us - a love which we do not **deserve**. It is by **grace** that we have been saved.

And that, my friends, is just the **beginning**, for it is **also** by grace that we have been blessed with even **more**! Paul continued, "*God **raised us up** with Christ and **seated us** with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable **riches** of His grace, expressed in His **kindness** to us in Christ Jesus.*" Does that sound like **your** life? It **should**, but sometimes we bury ourselves so deep in self-**pity** that it's difficult for us to **see**

how richly blessed we really have **been**. Nevertheless, God has blessed each one of us with riches which are **beyond** comparison. First of all, there are our **physical** blessings - our families and friends, our homes and schools, our health and wealth, our work and play. Many of these great physical blessings we often take for **granted** - that is of course until we have been **deprived** of some of them for a while. Then we begin to remember exactly how **precious** these gifts really are.

Secondly, we have been richly blessed in terms of **spiritual** blessings - our church body, our congregation, our Lutheran Elementary School and Sunday School, our life and faith, the **forgiveness** of sins, and our eternal **salvation**. These things too seem all too easy to **forget** about. Just to illustrate that a bit, even though we have been richly blessed in this congregation with the privilege of hearing God's **Word** and receiving the Lord's **Supper** regularly and frequently - for many people coming to church every 2nd or 3rd week seems to be "frequent enough," and receiving Holy Communion a couple of times a year will "fulfill their obligation." All too often God's gracious blessings are viewed as **negatives** - as **hindrances** - as **weights** that pull us **down** - instead of as the **positive** privileges which they are **meant** to be. And what about that **picture** up there? Most of the time we just look at it as a beautiful work of art, and we **forget** about its real meaning. Do you remember who He **is**, and what He **did** for you? Do you understand how **important** His suffering and death are to you? Jesus, the perfect Son of God, died on the cross to pay for the sins of the **world** - for **your** sins and **mine** - so that you and I could have **eternal life**. Just take a look at that **cross** over there. The cross is the most **vivid** symbol of God's grace - His undeserved love for us. Knowing what we know about **ourselves**, there can be no doubt in our minds that all these **blessings** - both **physical** and **spiritual** - are gifts which we have not **earned** or **deserved**. They are all **free gifts** which come from God's **grace**. It is by grace that we have been **blessed**.

That grace deserves a **response**. Now, whenever someone does something **good** for us, there is always the **possibility** that we might **not respond**. When we were **dead** in transgressions and sins, God made us **alive** again in Christ. It is **possible** for us who are now alive in Christ to remain **unresponsive** - to remain **inactive**. But that's **not** what God has in **mind** for us. He **made** us, He **saved** us, and He continues to **bless** us, so that we might **respond** to His grace with **good works**. And again, by God's grace, we **will** respond. Our lives must be **active** lives - lives which are lived for the glory of our **Savior**. The closing words of our text say it well, "*For we are **God's** workmanship, created in **Christ Jesus** to do **good***"

works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Dear friends, let us **Celebrate God’s Grace**. Let us thank Him for His graciousness in **forgiving** our sins, and **saving** us. Let us thank Him for **providing** this Christian congregation with the blessings of His **Word** and **Sacraments**. Let us thank Him for this beautiful **facility** in which we may worship Him, and for all the other **physical** blessings which He has bestowed on us. But let us also remember, that if we **Celebrate God’s Grace** here **today**, and then go home and **forget** about His grace, then we have **failed** miserably. God has given us much to **do**, and God has given us much to **share**. So the celebration must **continue** on - today, tomorrow, and always - as we carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ **beyond** this building, **beyond** this congregation, **beyond** this community, and all the way to the **ends of the earth**. May God continue to **bless** us as we **Celebrate His Grace** with our **lives**. Amen.