

Sermon Isaiah 43:16-21 John 11:21-27 Philippians 3:7-16 March 25,2007

## Amazing Grace - Guiding Us Into Life's "Goodness"

It began - this Lenten Season of preaching, with those aching lines out of the life of slave trader ship captain John Newton... Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.. And it ends really with the 4<sup>th</sup>. Verse we just sang... The Lord has promised good to me, his word my hope secures. He will my shield and portion be, as long as life endures. That's probably where Newton ended his hymn.

Over the weeks we've talked, well - yes - I've talked, about God's grace, about God's presence in our lives - helping us deal with our failures, and address the blindnesses in our lives, grace helping us face our fears, and come to some grips with the hurried and harried pace of our lives...

And through it all, the haunting melody and the simple and deep meaning of the hymn, it points us, guides us, Grace does, toward true goodness in life. God's Grace helps us see what is good and valuable and worthy and true. Amazing Grace - I hope you've sensed it in some new ways this Lenten Season at work in your life - God's word, God's spirit, nudging you, guiding you into a better sense of who you are and whose you are in Christ.

And - in part – in large measure finding goodness in our lives depends on those last words we just sang... on how long we think life endures...

Please pray with me -

Speak a word, Lord, through hymn or sermon, prayer or scripture, or through the fellowship of faith we find in this place. Speak to our hearts, Lord, and give us ears to hear, and wills to want to follow your way for us in Christ. Amen.

"Amazing Grace " - that saved a wretch like me... The Lord has promised good to me, his word my hope secures.... The hymn touches something deep and something true in us, and in our lives, doesn't it? It touches a truth we know - and sometimes, sometimes are even willing to admit to. We live by grace - and not by grit. We live by the wonder of God's plan and not by the power of our plans. We live best trusting a truth we've been shown in Christ, and not by trying to twist things to our own way of liking.

In the novel, To Kill a Mockingbird, Atticus, a white Lawyer chooses to defend a black man accused of attacking a white women - in the old pre civil rights South - and he and his children suffer the abuse of the community. Though many dangers, trials and snares we come sometimes in life...

And Atticus says these amazing words.... He says.. Real courage is when you know you're licked before you begin, but you begin anyway, and you see it through no matter what. You rarely win, but sometimes you do...

And that is as clear a statement of our Easter Faith without using religious words as I've read. And - I would add – and Easter declares – and the living Church proclaims it - win or lose - with such courage you always win.

Don't we know - don't we - almost before we begin - that we are licked in life.... And that we will win? That is grace - that's the call we've heard - that's faith in the promises of God... in life and in Christ.

The Psalmist sang it ... you heard it this morning... Do not remember the former things - all of life's defeats and disappointments... I am about to do a new thing - do you now perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness - So my people may declare my praise.

It was Isaiah's vision - It is our history and our present, too. God making things new - not just for today and tomorrow, but forever. That was the promise in Jesus' word to Martha - How long does life endure? I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.

And Jesus wouldn't let Martha go, or you or me... Jesus went on = Every one who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?

Do you believe this? Right at the heart of our faith...and.... of how we live too. How long do you think life endures? That's how long God will be good to you. And if you believe that the goodness of life is God's forever promise and gift for you - then - what good reason you and I have to do good. To live with Courage - not worrying if we win any battles, but in how we live.

That was Paul's powerful point to the Christians in Philippi.... I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.... I press on toward the goal for the prize of heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

It was the heart of Wilberforce's faith and courage in his crusade against Slavery - he never saw the battle finally won, but he fought for the right ....

There is a sadness in our media driven culture - the sadness in giving so much play to the wrong set of people, - or - maybe better said - to people with the wrong priorities in life. Dr. Timothy Johnson, ABC Medical Expert, but also an ordained clergy person, in his new book - Finding God in the Questions - talks about a journalist he knows and his remarkable observation of people.

Interviewing hundreds and hundreds of people for all kinds of news stories, this journalist divided the people he interviewed or reported about into two classes - the stars and the servants.

The stars have everything going for them - all that fame and fortune can provide - and he calls them some of the most miserable people he has ever met. Marriages and families in crisis, substance abusers, deeply depressed and tormented by self-doubt - He found little true joy or goodness in their lives.

On the other hand, he said, the servants he interviewed, volunteers giving gobs of time on the Gulf Coast recovery effort, or working at free clinics and soup kitchens in the inner cities, or part of the Peace corps, or America's Teaching Corps, or Missionaries, or soldiers,..

Among such people he found people with unfailing compassion and great human understanding and joy - a kind of joy he almost never found among the stars.

Servants - yes - they served a larger purpose than themselves - something they felt would endure as long as life endures.....

How long does life endure? It makes all the difference there is in deciding what is truly good and what is not. And - in what to invest your life....two things this morning - two things to remember -

1. God's Amazing Grace - a vision of how long life endures in the risen Christ.
2. And - the power of our belief in God Grace for guiding our lives...

It has long been the catch phrase of this Church - Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God - of late we've put this truth into some action statements.... Care for Christ - Care for Christ's Church - for each other, and Care for the Community - God's people everywhere.

This is the spirit that stirred the Master Plan - and is the motivation for Building to Share - what we have been planning for a number of years and will be taking action upon later this morning. The words - and even the project that is being proposed - are but tangible reminders of what describes and defines goodness in life. A commitment to Christ's way and truth and life....

That 's our guide... God first - God's Grace - God's ways in Christ... And then... we have the assurance of our faith, that no set back in life, no stock rise or fall, no job gain or job loss, no illness defeated for awhile, or our final face to face with death....

In Christ and through Christ we know that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

If I have faith in, trust in, a hold on the God who has a hold on me, and the whole universe, what then should I fear?

Look back - just a quick look - Isaiah and Paul warn - look back and see... Through many dangers trials and snares - God's Church has already come... and its larger in today's world than ever before . It is the Church Paul lived and died and lived for..

He knew - Grace had brought him safe thus far.... And Grace would lead him home.... And its true for us. We know we are licked before we begin... we do. We will not survive this earthly life - We will not Win this round in the running score of life.... But we do all the good we can in all the ways we can, as long as we can any way. We build for a future knowing that our hope for our future is secured - for life, the goodness of life - endures for ever

By Grace - We press on for the goal of the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus  
By Grace - We live into our hope of a future goodness secured by God's love for us , A goodness that lasts as long - as long as life endures.

The Lord has promised Good to me, and to you, His word our hope secures.... As long as life endures.... And the Easter promise is that our hope if forever. Amen.

David W. Robertson, Pastor