

“Access to Grace”

Trinity Sunday ~ June 16, 2019

Rev. Beckie Sweet

Romans 5:1-5 (NRSV) Results of Justification

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, **2** through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. **3** And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, **4** and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, **5** and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

John 16:12-15 (NRSV)

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. **13** When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. **14** He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. **15** All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

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Richard Strauss is the former pastor of Emmanuel Faith Community Church in Escondido, CA. He reported that periodically through the years, there had been players from the San Diego Padres who attended his church. And sometimes they offered him tickets to the Padres games. He goes on to tell us about the first time he approached the “will Call” window at the stadium to pick up his tickets. He was just supposed to give them his name and they were supposed to give him the tickets. That was it. But, not having experienced anything like that before, he couldn’t believe it was that simple. And so he was apprehensive when he walked up to the window.

Suppose the player had forgotten to make the arrangements. Suppose they didn’t believe him when he told them who he was. He had nothing to offer for the tickets -- you can’t pay for tickets at the “will call” window -- you just pick them up, and besides, he never could have afforded the tickets on his meager income. It just didn’t seem right to walk up there and ask for

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tickets and not have anything to give in exchange for them. It was difficult for Richard to believe it was that simple. But, wonder of wonders, it worked! They just handed him the tickets, and he walked in and enjoyed the game. The next time, of course, he knew what to expect, and was much more confident as he approached the “will call” window!

You know, we’ve been told so many times that there are no free lunches. And so, when someone genuinely wants to give us something out of the pure grace and goodness of their hearts, we find it difficult to believe, and sometimes difficult to accept. So, when God tells us that by just having faith in Christ, we have access to eternal salvation out of the pure grace and goodness of God’s heart, we can hardly believe it! It seems too simple. We are not expected to pay for anything: forgiveness of sins, salvation and eternal life, the opportunity to praise. And, we certainly would not be able to earn a gift of that magnitude. Our faith-filled access to free grace makes all of this a miraculous, often overwhelming, reality!

That is what the sacraments of the church are all about, you know. In Holy Communion and Christian Baptism, following the example of Jesus as described in the Scriptures, we experience “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.” In Gideon’s baptism today, he experienced and we witnessed, the outward and visible sign of water being showered upon him. Water: without it, our lives would perish. But too much water, through flood or drowning, can be damaging or even fatal. This water becomes a sign of the washing away of our sins, and God’s providential care by providing a supply of grace that is sufficient for sustaining abundant living, should we choose to accept that grace fully.

Had Richard Strauss felt too skeptical, inhibited or unworthy to go to the “will call” window, he would have missed out on the joy of attending a professional baseball game during one of the Padres’ more exciting seasons. He went on to report that at the baseball games, he found the opportunity to witness to his faith, to pray for and with those he encountered, and to join the players in some of their charitable work in the community, thereby advancing the cause of Christ and the ministry of the church. All of that

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happened because a player generously offered him some free tickets, and Richard took the risk of accepting them and engaging in the game.

Friends, God invites us to experience grace fully through the sacraments of the church, through forgiveness of sins, through assurance of salvation by faith. The free and unrestricted access is granted by our Savior. It is offered generously, with “no strings attached.” The question then becomes, can we lay aside our fears, our doubts, our skepticism, our inhibitions, and claim that access to grace? That choice is each of ours to make. And, whether we come reservedly, with joyous abandon, or overwhelmed by gratitude for this unmerited gift, **the important thing is that we come.** We come to Christ to lay down the burdens of this life, to be cleansed of our sins, regrets, sorrows, and fears, and accept the new opportunities and freedom that only our God can give. You, we, have access to that grace through faith in the One who offers salvation to all. Take heart, for Christ is calling us today. Alleluia! Amen!