

**Reformation: Sola Gratia**  
**November 19, 2017**  
**Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church**  
**Farmington, NM**

**John 1:1-3,14,16,17** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

16 Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

**“Grace Alone — Amazing!”**

I don't want to scare anyone, but Thanksgiving is just around the corner. And you know what that means. Once we've turned that corner, it will be all out chaos until January 2nd. Ok, maybe that's a slight exaggeration. We look forward to this season all year long. But when it hits, we never feel completely, adequately prepared. It comes quick and seems like it comes all at once. Sprinkled in with a few extra days off of work and time with loved ones are all the parties and preparations, shopping and selecting, decorating and delicious foods.

This is the right time of year to keep the focus on Grace, to celebrate God's grace to us in Jesus Christ. When we hear these words from John chapter one, we are reminded that grace comes to us in the person of Jesus.

People recognize this is a special time of year. We try to act a little better. Improve our behavior. Treat the people around us with greater respect and compassion. And this time of year it is almost unavoidable the need for a little grace from God to help accomplish all that. Slightly religious people and not-at-all religious people want to think of God, if there is a god at all, as loving and gracious. And if he is real, he could help by giving us a dose of kindness to help us all be better people. We already know what we should be doing. God can help improve our performance, like getting the latest smartphone with the newest software or splurging on that V8 engine for extra power.

Of course, there are some people who really need God's grace. Criminals need it. Abusers who can't kick the habit. People who can't take care of their own family. People who abuse their power. Sexual assailants. Predators preying upon the weak and the vulnerable. If there is going to be any hope for them, they will need grace.

And we could use some grace too. We all need grace to keep this time of year from tipping out of control and flipping over to become a downer, the trappings of the season causing us to cringe by uncovering all the issues in our lives. If we don't keep on top of things, they can easily spin out of control. So as long as we get things in order, we can keep the stress away. As long as family and work don't destroy our plans, we won't get caught up in the gloom and disappointment that so often turns this into a negative, dreary time of year.

We need grace. We need it like we need a power surge, a dose of good medicine, a divine jolt of coffee to up our performance for God. If God could just push us in the right direction so we can do what we need to do, if he could just give us a hand to handle our struggles, then we could hold up under all this pressure. 'Give me some grace' we think when someone is being way too critical about something insignificant. 'Give me grace' when we're caught in a lie we can't cover up. Grace for the mistake I made intentionally but hope won't get called out on.

But grace that gives us a boost isn't really all that amazing. We need grace. It's just that our version of grace is too cheap, too flimsy, too watered down. God designed us to share something special with him. He wants all people to be in complete conformity with his will so we can enjoy perfect harmony with him. But we're not even close. Our biggest problem is we don't even realize how badly we need God's grace. How helpless we are without it. How desperate our situation without him. How we need more than just a little help.

Our idea of grace just papers over this lie that things will be ok if people just treat me with a little more kindness. I'll be able to work things out once I develop the right routine. I'll get where I need to go once I can overcome all the distractions and prove all my critics wrong. But this idea of grace doesn't require Jesus to do what he did.

Father Greg Boyle founded Homeboy Industries to get gang members out of their lifestyles and into a job with a new purpose in life. When he first got started trying to find jobs for neighborhood kids trying to get out of gangs, they kept hitting snags. When one little thing from their home or family or friends would throw a monkey wrench into their plans, all the work would just unravel. So Father Greg began to realize he needed to address something deeper than just joblessness. He had to bring healing to those hurting souls. They were caring around the toxic stress from suffering and scars like some heavy old backpack. He had to help them transform their pain so they could stop transmitting the pain. He had to address the lethal absence of hope. He had to get down deep into the despair.

For real healing, you need grace. You need someone to address your broken relationship with your God. Instead of someone to help you try harder, you need someone to get rid of that toxic guilt of knowing you aren't perfect and you never will be. You need someone to take off your shoulders that loaded backpacks of shame over how you've hurt the people around you. That grace comes in the person of Jesus.

Grace isn't a thing you can get after doing your best. Maybe you've heard the easy to remember definition of grace: God's undeserved love. But why does God love us? Grace says it is God's attitude toward sinners. But how? Grace says it is all on account of Jesus Christ. John chapter one rolls out God's script for unveiling his grace to us: **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."** (John 1:1) The Word is John's code name for Jesus. The Word is a way to let us know Jesus is that complete and ultimate revelation of God in human form.

John follows up by telling us what happened with the Word: **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”** (John 1:14) God himself took on flesh. This flesh is the reality of a completely human Jesus. The infinite God took flesh because he had to. It was absolutely necessary since my person and your person are out of sync with God. Our reality in our human flesh is one of futility and failure. We are out of tune from God’s will and design. So Jesus took human flesh because of the reality of darkness and death awaiting every human soul.

Grace comes in the person of Jesus. Grace is the infinite God for all the universe coming into the world as a tiny, helpless newborn. Grace is amazing when we realize what Jesus gave up to come to this earth in the first place. Grace is amazing when we realize Jesus understood the end goal of his life on this earth. Grace is amazing because his Son is the supreme proof of undeserved love for the world. Only as the one and only Son can Jesus rescue sinners bound to destruction and hell. John reports for us: **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”** (John 1:14) Jesus shows his glory in an unexpected and un-asked-for way. We would expect Jesus to show off his glory in huge demonstrations of power, ultimate acts of kindness toward the vulnerable or dramatic displays of his perfect track record. Instead, the ultimate demonstration of his divine glory is in his passion, his suffering and death. Jesus came in the flesh so he could live in an obedience we can not. Jesus came in the flesh to die the death we deserve.

God’s grace just as necessary for the murderer as for the mall-shopper. God’s grace is just as powerful for the criminal sitting in a jail cell as the grandmother preparing care packages for grandchildren. God’s grace works just as well for creeps who prey on the vulnerable by perpetrating sexual assault as your auntie going all out for Thanksgiving dinner.

Grace is what you get when you stop trying to earn points with God. When you give up trying to get credit for all your efforts. When you realize you need more than just a nudge, just a push, when you realize you need a Savior.

Grace in the person of Jesus is the only antidote to the deep sickness and desperation inside every one of us. A few chapters later in the Gospel according to John, Jesus seeks out a Samaritan woman at a well. She has had five unsuccessful marriages and is now living with a man who isn’t her husband. Jesus is her grace like living water welling up to eternal life (John 4:14). In the chapter right before that Jesus sits and patiently instructs Nicodemus, a religious scholar who just couldn’t get the basics of the faith. For the ignorant intellectual, Jesus gives him the grace of new birth. Peter denied his Savior. Jesus gave him the grace of restoration to feed his sheep and lambs. Paul persecuted and led believers to their execution. Jesus gave him the grace of turning him into the greatest missionary. Grace isn’t just a jolt. Grace is 100% dependence on God’s love for us demonstrated in the life and death and victory of Jesus Christ.

Grace coming in the person of Jesus means the end to a religious system to help you become a more deserving person. Grace in the flesh means putting to rest your doubts and uncertainties about whether you can ever be good enough or whether God can ever be

satisfied with your efforts. Grace embodied in the enfleshed Jesus means more than just a theological concept or important doctrine. Grace is real. Grace makes alive. Grace works in your life.

Go into this crazy, chaotic, wonderful season with God's gift already unwrapped. As God's special, cherished child, you already have your Father's greatest gift: **"Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given."** (John 1:16) God had already revealed his will to his people from the earliest of times. This is where so many of your sincere, well-intentioned Christian friends get it wrong. Jesus came to be more than good instructions or inspiration to try harder. Amazingly, in Jesus we have grace in addition to that grace already given. Through Jesus you have God's adoption. And now you don't have to look any further than Jesus Christ: **"For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."** (John 1:17)

We get the ultimate spoiler of how it is all going to end. Not just this chaotic and joyful season of the year, but all of it. Jesus is your amazing grace. In amazing generosity Jesus gives you everything he earned in his life. In undeserved love you have the healing and peace you can't get anywhere else. Jesus is your amazing grace. Amen.

*+ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen. +*