

Scripture: John 4:5-20; Romans 5:6-11  
Message: So Much Grace to Share  
July 22, 2018; Bethel CRC, Brockville, ON  
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Romans 5 is one of those passages of the Bible that we read comfortably when we think it's about us. We can put our own name in these verses about being powerless and ungodly and give thanks that Christ died for us. We can rejoice over the assurance that we are no longer enemies of God, but restored in our relationship to him, through Christ Jesus who died for us and rose again.

It's a wonderful passage of grace.

It becomes a bit more difficult, a bit more troubling, when we read these verses and bring to mind the images of people whom we think are less deserving of grace. Can these words actually apply to *them*?!

It's easy to praise God for the grace shown to *us* in Jesus Christ. It's harder to recognize that there is so much of God's grace to also cover those sins we think of as more offensive. "Does God forgive *those* sins? Will he forgive *those* sinners?" If we aren't careful, we can slip into the error of imagining that there are *limits* to God's grace, as if there's only so much to go around.

Praise God for his abundant grace! But this praise must also move beyond a focus on our *own* forgiveness. Who else is included in receiving God's lavish, generous grace?

How about a Samaritan woman who is in her fifth marriage, and isn't even married to this *current* guy? Now, we might quickly make some assumptions about this woman, thinking she only got what she deserved. It's easy to label her as a sleazy, sinful woman. But not necessarily.

Don't forget that in Jesus' day, women had almost no rights and no social standing. They certainly could not divorce a man; they could only ask that the husband would divorce her. A husband could quite simply make a declaration of divorce and obtain a certificate of divorce. Women didn't have much say in the matter. And so perhaps this woman was caught in relationships with men who used her and simply discarded her like a dirty dish rag when they had enough. Or perhaps some of her previous husbands had died and she had no way to provide for herself except to marry someone else.

We don't know her story. We draw some of our conclusions from reading that she is

coming to get water at noon, at the heat of the day. This was not the normal time when women would come to the well. So, it's very likely that she just wants to quietly get some water, and avoid the possible stares and whispers and insults of her neighbours.

But when she comes, there's a man at the well, a Jewish man, no less. You didn't see too many Jews in Samaria most days. Jews avoided travelling through Samaria, willingly adding a few extra days to their journey.

Jesus had opted against that and so cut straight through the heart of Samaria. So when this woman saw this Jewish man, she perhaps averted her eyes, grit her teeth, and hoped to get through this as painlessly as possible. But then the man cleared his throat, and she no doubt thought, "Here it comes!"

But there is a kind quality to his voice. He even *asks* her for some water, instead of barking out a demand to her. Probably she should have kept her mouth shut but she is so taken aback that she blurts out, "What in the world is going on here!? You, a Jew, a man, are not supposed to talk to me, a Samaritan woman!"

Jesus was indeed breaking with normal way of doing things to talk to this woman. Even more than the gender barrier, by asking for a drink, Jesus is placing himself at her service. He asks for something that he cannot do for himself. He gives her dignity, in allowing her to take care of him. He offers her the water of life, the gift of grace.

With whom are you willing to have a conversation? Are there certain kinds of people you try to avoid? Or, let's bring it right into our homes, who is welcome to sit at your table?

Do you expect people to be dressed a certain way before you will share a meal with them?

Do you expect people to behave a certain way, or promise to behave a certain way, before you will share a meal with them?

Do you expect people to think about things in a certain way, like politics or religion or lifestyle or fashion or arts, before you will share a meal with them?

Who is welcome to sit at your table?

Who is welcome at the *Lord's* table? Is there a certain standard that has to be met? A particular level of obedience? Is there a required standard of how someone lives before they can receive the grace Jesus offers at his table?

We love to talk about grace and how amazing it is and that my chains are gone. It's

great to talk about God's grace to *me*. It can be more difficult to speak about grace, especially as we consider *to whom* we speak about grace.

It is important to accept that there is so much grace to give. But are there people we think of as beyond redemption? Are there opportunities for outreach and justice work that we shrink away from out of fear that grace is simply not big enough? Or that "those people" don't deserve God's grace. Or they wouldn't want it anyway.

Our calling as children in the family of God, as disciples of Jesus, is to heal, to give people back the dignity that is so easily taken away by others. We give that dignity when we carry the presence of God into every room we enter and into every life we encounter, into every conversation we have. We show respect as we communicate this good news to others that they are created in the image of God and are inherently worthy of love. In our action, as maybe even with words, we communicate that God has revealed his love for them through Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

We communicate this grace, before demanding confession of sin or changing of ways or expectation of certain behaviour. Consider the three words: Belong, Believe, Behave. Which comes first in our approach to welcoming someone to the family of God? Do we expect them to behave correctly before they believe or belong? Do we expect them to believe correctly before they belong or behave? Do we allow them to belong as they understand what it is to believe and how that impacts how they behave?

Do our lives and words and actions overflow with this expression of so much grace to share?

Life with God is not for spiritual champions. The gospel is for admitted failures, for confessed incompetents, for people like all of us when we are honest.

And how many of those admitted failures and confessed incompetents are in this building? We are. How many are not here? Yet. They are also walking on the street and sitting in the coffee shop and waiting at the clinic and playing in the park. Some of them look and behave very differently than we do. Some of them have very different ideas about what is right and wrong.

Do you hear my language? "Some of *them*." How often do we look at others with that attitude of "us" and "them"? How often does that attitude affect our understanding of God's grace to others?

This past week I introduced myself to the summer students at the Connections program in our church. I did not scan the room to evaluate their clothing choices or their choice of hair colour and decide which students I would speak to. I want all of these students to feel welcome in our building and to know that I am a friendly person, willing to listen or talk with them. Every one of them.

What's your first reaction to a person with purple hair? Or torn jeans? Or multiple tattoos? Or different lifestyle choices? Or...you can add to the list. What's your first reaction to someone who is different from you? Are you thinking of how to change them? Or are you prepared to enter into a conversation, "Hi. Could you help me with this...?"

I know that there are people who hesitate to come into this church building because of the fear of being judged for who they are or for their life circumstances. It might not be that *you* have caused that offense, nor that you *would* judge them in any way. But they feel, and fear, that sense of judgment from within the church.

We can't wait for people to come into this building to experience grace. We must meet them where they are, at the well at noon when no one else is around. When we meet them, let us live and share the grace that we know so well.

Let us live the grace that we know Jesus has shown to us. There is so much grace to give. Our Saviour is generous in his grace.

Amen.