

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

The Gospel of Luke has so many great stories of faith! Stories where faith is strong, and stories where we might think it is lacking. Think of the woman who washed Jesus feet with her tears. Jesus tells her that her sins are forgiven and adds "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (Luke 7) Then there was the time the disciples panic when they are in a windstorm on the lake and they wake Jesus up telling him they "are perishing" and Jesus asks them "Where is your faith?" (Luke 8) Or remember when the woman with the hemorrhage touched the fringe of Jesus' prayer shawl and after asking who had touched him, Jesus tells her "your faith has made you well, go in peace" (Luke 8)

I especially like the story last Sunday, of the centurion's faith when he asks Jesus through others to heal the centurion's servant. Jewish elders tell Jesus that the centurion "is worthy of having you do this for him..." Then when Jesus is on the way, the centurion sends others saying "I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed." Jesus is amazed and tells the crowd "not even in Israel have I found such faith." (Luke 7)

I also like stories such as when Jesus cleanses a leper and tells him to "tell no one." But the word about Jesus spreads anyway. I notice the contrast when people shared the news about Jesus even when they were told not to share it, but how people nowadays often do not share the news even when Jesus has commanded them to share it.

And in our Gospel today, God's Son sees the widow's son being carried out of the city gate on a bier and brings him back to life. Perhaps this is another example of faith? Perhaps it is an example of gratitude?

But, maybe this story is not about faith. Maybe it is not about gratitude either. Maybe this story is about grace. Maybe it is about pure, unadulterated, undiluted, unbidden, unearned, unasked-for grace. I think it is! This story is not about a mother's faith or her son's worthiness or unworthiness, or the gratitude that one or the other or both may have felt toward Jesus. It is all about grace! It happens because Jesus has compassion for her a grieving widow. Period.

The mother did not have to act faithfully, the son did not have to live gratefully. It might be that both the mother and son were faithful and grateful. But my point is that the point of this story is not the mother and son. The point of this story is Jesus' compassion.

The point is that when grace comes into our lives, it requires nothing of us but a choice - to receive it or not. The Way of Life meets the way of death at the city gate. Now note this: Jesus saw the need and acted. Jesus took the initiative, then, as now.

Jesus had compassion - the root word in Greek means that the depth of Jesus' feelings came from the pit of his stomach. In Greek this is the same verb used in the story of the prodigal son when his father sees him coming home, the same verb used in the story of the good Samaritan.

This is not a foreshadowing of what is to come because the widow's son receives a new lease on his old life. But because of Jesus' compassion, his overwhelming compassion for us, he died a miserable death on the cross. Jesus died in our place, and because of Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection, we receive new life in this world and in the world to come. Jesus gives us more than physical life, he gives us new life, peace, joy, change, reversal, transformation, a new beginning.

Grace comes unbidden, often at the least expected of times. We cannot earn it. We cannot work for it. We cannot plead for it. It just comes. What we can do is choose whether to receive it or reject it, we can choose whether to be transformed by it, to be a conduit for it as it flows us to others. Brothers and sisters we are called to be prophetic in the sense that we are aware of the needs of the world around us, and we speak the truth about the conditions of the world around us, we are called to be conduits of God's grace.

Through Jesus in each of us, God comes to the aid of the helpless, those on the outside, who feel abandoned, and we are called to share God's renewed presence and blessing, each and every day. This story is all about grace. Our lives are all about grace.

AMEN