

Pastor Roy's Sermon from June 2, 2013

Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 6/2/13

Solomon prays for something that is not based on nationality. He prays that people from other lands will come to learn of God through the temple he has built. But it isn't the temple that draws the people but God's outstretched arm and mighty hand. In other words God and God's people's actions for justice and peace will attract those who seek wisdom. For Solomon, wisdom flows from God who keeps faithful, covenant love.

Jesus teaches, and Paul reminds, that walking with God is an inner relationship--our spirits communing with the Spirit of God. Paul recalls receiving the Gospel directly from the Spirit of Christ. Paul's point is that the Gospel is not a matter of personal opinion or political persuasion. It's not about human approval or authority as some in Galatia had made it out to be.

The Gospel is the fiery wind and breath of God's Spirit at work in this world. It cannot be contained or confined. The Spirit is God at work within us and through us. We can't depend on our own persuasion to get things done, but must allow the Spirit to proclaim and accomplish the good news. For Paul, the Gospel is first about the grace of Jesus Christ, the mercy of God.

We learn from Solomon, Paul, and Jesus that the Holy Spirit works in the humility of grace for all who receive it.

We learn this from the Centurion. He's very concerned about his slave who is near death. The centurion is humble; he does not feel worthy to have Jesus in his home. But he boldly believes that Jesus can give the word and his servant will be healed from a distance.

His faith is twofold. First, he believes Jesus can help. Second, he gives up his own political and social power because he understands that grace isn't a matter of trading strength for strength. Healing does not come to those who trade favors. Healing comes to those who recognize and welcome pure mercy.

It is always a temptation to try to earn our own healing. To prove ourselves worthy. To enjoy whatever spiritual, social, or political powers we find in our possession. True wisdom, the Gospel, calls us to lay these down and accept grace that comes to us. There is no status in the kingdom of God. We are all at times tempted to think there is, but as the expression goes, the ground is level at the cross.

Leading up to and ending on the cross, Jesus releases any authority, position, or advantage that he has, and lets go of his life for healing. By offering himself, he creates freedom. Jesus demonstrates on the cross that the wisdom of God is about deep trust in free grace.

That is why Jesus says, "I have not found such faith even in Israel" after the centurion reveals his faith. Here is a political military man with social status too, who sets aside his powers to allow pure grace to work its goodness. He realized that force and grace are mutually exclusive. Each is ignorant of the other's ways. You cannot have both at the same time. In the New Testament, the disciples don't seem to learn this humble acceptance of Grace until the book of Acts. And even then it seems to be a struggle.

Jesus' decision to yield to the cross forced the disciples to get on board with the true nature of grace or to walk away forever. Some of the women understood the Gospel before the cross. Mary Magdalene

loved Jesus more than money or status. She had received mercy, and that's all she cared about from that point on. Mary, sister of Lazarus and Martha, also understood. She didn't care what people thought, she was going to listen to Jesus first, then perform her social obligations in the kitchen. She got it! The Gentile woman whose daughter was terribly ill and unable to help herself gladly humbles herself before Jesus. She doesn't care what Jesus thinks or says of her and her people, she wants mercy. That's all that matters—the healing of her daughter whom she loves more than life itself. The one leper who was not a Jew, who had nothing with which to bargain, returns to Jesus to express his gratitude. He wasn't healed because he deserved it; he was healed purely out of the generosity of God. I guess the others thought they somehow deserved to be healed and so they, in their ecstasy and new freedom didn't think to turn and say thank you.

If you think about it, the people who had no status or reputation tend to understand and accept God's grace in the Gospels. They are humble. They are shocked by God's mercy and the eternal foundation of grace at work in all of God's creation. It is quite shocking how the abundance of God is constantly at work without fail, without end. Their misunderstanding of faith had falsely told them they had no value. Jesus tells them otherwise during his ministry. . .and they tend to get it because their humility opens them to the wisdom of God. No false pride to prevent them from receiving mercy.

Yet the centurion had plenty of reputation and social status. How did he, a Roman officer, humbly understand grace? The Gospel is full of surprises and unexpected turns. If there is hope for the centurion, for the Marys, for the despairing Gentile mother, for all the outsiders, perhaps most of all, if there was hope for the disciples who had such a hard time figuring out the true ways of God, there is certainly hope for you and me.

When it comes to faith and trusting, if we learn to wait—to let go of our illusions of power to trade, if we learn to let go of our desire to earn meaning rather than simply receive it as the gift of God, then humility will reveal the goodness and healing of God around us.

The Holy Spirit works in the humility of grace for all who receive it. Amen.