

DON'T RECEIVE THE GRACE OF GOD IN VAIN!

I. Now Is the Only Time of Grace

II. Time to Endure as God's Servants

2 Corinthians 6:1-10

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2021 | LENT

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Invocavit

<i>Old Testament</i>	Genesis 3:1–24
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 32, CW p. 78
<i>Epistle</i>	2 Corinthians 6:1–10 or <u>Hebrews 4:14–16</u>
<i>Gospel</i>	Matthew 4:1–11
<i>Chief Hymn</i>	ELH 250/251

GRANTS PASS Divine Service, Rite Two, p. 60

The Entrance Hymn or Introit – ELH 252 vv. 1-4 I Walk in Danger All the Way

Chief Hymn – ELH 364 O for a Faith that Will Not Shrink

Distribution Hymn – ELH 329 The Death of Jesus Christ, Our Lord

Closing Hymn – ELH 252 vv. 5 & 6 - I Walk in Danger All the Way

MEDFORD Common Order, p. 15

Psalm 32, CW p. 78

Opening Hymn - CW 431 vv. 1-4 I Walk in Danger all the way

Hymn of the Day – CW 444 If You But Trust in God to Guide You

Distribution Hymn - CW 135 The Death of Jesus Christ, Our Lord

Closing Hymn - CW 431 vv. 5-6 I Walk in Danger All the Way

St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Lombard, IL

Edward L. Bryant, Pastor

2 Corinthians 6:1–10 (CSB)

Working together with him, we also appeal to you, “Don’t receive the grace of God in vain.”² For he says:

**At an acceptable time I listened to you,
and in the day of salvation I helped you.**

See, now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation!

³ We are not giving anyone an occasion for offense, so that the ministry will not be blamed. ⁴ Instead, as God’s ministers, we commend ourselves in everything: by great endurance, by afflictions, by hardships, by difficulties, ⁵ by beatings, by imprisonments, by riots, by labors, by sleepless nights, by times of hunger, ⁶ by purity, by knowledge, by patience, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, ⁷ by the word of truth, by the power of God; through weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, ⁸ through glory and dishonor, through slander and good report; regarded as deceivers, yet true; ⁹ as unknown, yet recognized; as dying, yet see—we live; as being disciplined, yet not killed; ¹⁰ as grieving, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet enriching many; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

Dear fellow redeemed: You have been bought at the price of the life-blood of the Son of God, and this redemption has been given to you through the gospel and you have received it by faith for the forgiveness of sins. As I said before, the lessons for pre-Lent and Lent all fall under the general heading, “*The Life of the Blood-bought Christian.*”

Today’s lesson reiterates the point that Peter made in the lesson for Ash Wednesday; **we also appeal to you, “Don’t receive the grace of God in vain.”² For he says:**

**At an acceptable time I listened to you,
and in the day of salvation I helped you.**

See, now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation! Again, our plea for you is ...

DON’T RECEIVE THE GRACE OF GOD IN VAIN!

I. Now Is the Only Time of Grace

II. Time to Endure as God’s Servants

I. Now Is the Only Time of Grace

Paul had just summarized the gracious work of God in the substitutionary atonement of Christ. “***He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.***” (2 Corinthians 5:21, CSB) This grace has been given to you through the word of the Gospel. It has been given to you NOW.

Here at this place and time, today, this is a gracious moment, when God looks upon you, not with judgment, but with mercy and forgiveness. All our sins are forgotten. All the sins of the past and of the present are nothing to God. He doesn’t just overlook them, they are gone, as if they were undone. And in their place is only the goodness of Christ, and the good that you have lived out in your life are pleasing to Him.

These are golden years, for we live under grace. God hears your prayers and helps you. Some might question that, because the life of the Christian isn’t necessarily easy, but this is His grace to us, that we live through even the terrible times secure in His love, and secure in the fact that He is preparing a place for us. Don’t be blind to His unfailing love; don’t undervalue the

eternal joy in store for you; don't neglect the deep wisdom and blessing of His word in living your life. Above all, don't lose it all by neglecting the word of the gospel that pours life into your soul.

I plead with you! On Ash Wednesday I pleaded with you, along with Peter, to build on your faith a Christian life that makes the gospel part of your life. Today, with Paul, I plead with you to treasure the grace of God given to you. Savor your forgiveness, let go your regrets, rest in the grace of God, His perfect love for you, as you are.

Sadly, many have turned away from God's grace. Every chair that has become empty, every name in the directory that stands for a face we no longer see, is a reminder of those who received the grace of God in vain, who cast it away. As Luther said, "To receive the grace of God in vain can be nothing else than to hear the pure word of God which presents and offers his grace, and yet to remain listless and irresponsible, undergoing no change at all."¹ It is like the guests bidden to the great supper (Luke 14:16-24) but who refused to come.

Don't think that you can cast it away today and pick it up again tomorrow. **See, now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation!** The history of the church tells us that the word of God's grace comes like a shower that passes and is gone. Don't think that if you are indifferent to the call of the Holy Spirit today, that the call will be there later. We also see that God's word comes richly in one generation and then is met with indifference by the next. Joshua's generation entered into the promised land and declared, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!" and yet the next generation and the one after that forgot the grace of God and clung to their idols.

II. Time to Endure as God's Servants

If all of you here are to endure in the faith, and not let loose of the greatest blessing that has ever come to humanity, then as Peter said (on Ash Wednesday), you must build on your faith around the gospel, and as Paul says (today) you must recognize this as a time to endure in the faith.

Now remember, Paul is under attack from those "super-apostles" in Corinth. Faithful pastors are always criticized, and Christians in general carry a cross, but this shouldn't cause you to stumble in your faith. **³We are not giving anyone an occasion for offense, so that the ministry will not be blamed. ⁴Instead, as God's ministers, we commend ourselves in everything:**

This is a warning us against being offended by the trials of the Christian life. Rather than blaming the ministry of the gospel, Paul says, **we commend ourselves in everything:** that is "we point to our perseverance in the face of troubles to show you that we speak the truth in good faith. Even today we point to what the apostles went through as evidence that they spoke the truth: No sense suffering for something you made up! So, Paul says, they are commended ...

by great endurance, and what does he endure? by afflictions, by hardships, by difficulties, ⁵by beatings, by imprisonments, by riots, by labors, by sleepless nights, by times of hunger,

For the sake of the grace of God, the ministry of the gospel comes to us despite these things. We also may endure these things.

At the same time what do we show in our lives toward those who persecute us for the faith? Vengeance? Retaliation? No. The ministry of the gospel, Christians in their lives are not blamed because they are known ... **⁶by purity, by knowledge, by patience, by kindness.** Grace is paramount in our lives, and when so motivated, it is by purity of motive, because we

¹ Ed. Lenker, John Nicholas, *Sermons of Martin Luther, Volume 7*, Baker Book House. P. 135

know about, have **knowledge** of this cosmic conflict we are in. And so while the world is in conflict, we show **patience** and **kindness**, rooted in grace. Are you gracious? Or do you chew on the bones of remembered wrongs?

So don't give up on the grace of God when there are troubles, but see the role that grace plays in the lives of Christians and as people like Paul show us, and some of our own ministers of grace as well.

And how can that be? Through the word, **by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, ⁷ by the word of truth, by the power of God.** Through the word, the "power of God unto salvation," the gospel, we understand where true grace lies in this world.

We are living through a good example of this. Christians are now seen as haters for being forgiving, because forgiveness implies disapproval, and the word of Scripture is branded as hate-speech. Some are so swept up in the opinions of the world of today, that they will forsake the grace of God to gain the approval of the world. But the ideas of today are not new, and have been "new" and then rejected many times in the past.

So, **through weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left**, again the "sword of the Spirit, the word of God" we do not stumble in our faith but know who is Lord and Savior.

Therefore we avoid the deceit of the world that demeans, ridicules, and cancels Christians, **⁸ through glory and dishonor, through slander and good report; regarded as deceivers, yet true; ⁹ as unknown, yet recognized; as dying, yet see—we live;** We know what the world says, and we know the truth.

That is what is needed if you are to receive the Grace of God, not in vain, but in enduring hope, **as being disciplined, yet not killed; ¹⁰ as grieving, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet enriching many; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.**

Dear ones. We live in a deceitful world. Our Lord has invaded this world and bestowed on you His mercy, His forgiveness, His righteousness, and -what's more- His future, His salvation, His heaven. It is yours through faith. Build on your faith a Christian life, as Peter says, and then do not let the troubles that come to you dismay you or deceive you. Do not let them cause you to stumble or become indifferent to the Grace of God you have been given.

"Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will experience affliction for ten days. Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Revelation 2:10, CSB)

AMEN