

Sermon: Methodist DNA: Prevenient Grace
Text: John 6:44
Date: July 19, 2009 AM
Place: Jesup First UMC

Christina had it pretty good at home, but she just couldn't live by mama's rules and besides, she really wanted to see the world. So, one morning, she wrote a note, packed her bags, and left for the big city. And it broke mama's heart. So, Maria went down to the drugstore and spent all her money on pictures of herself. Then, she packed her things and a purse full of pictures and went looking for Christina. And everywhere she went – in the bars and the hotels, in the nightclubs and the street corners – she left a picture for Christina to find. And on the back of each picture, she left a message.

Well, after a few weeks, Christina was a different girl. Her face was tired; her eyes were filled with fear and pain; and her heart was broken. Her dreams had become a nightmare. Then, one night, she went into a hotel restroom and on the mirror, she saw a familiar face, the face of her mama. She grabbed the picture, turned it over, and read these words: "*Whatever you've done, whatever you've become, it doesn't matter. Please come home.*" And so, Christina went home. ⁱ

They had a good Father. He loved them and He gave them the run of the place. He just had one simple rule, but they didn't seem to care. They broke that rule and when they did, they broke their Father's heart. And it wasn't long before they left home for the far country. Now, Daddy kept hoping they'd come home but they never did. And so, one day, He went looking for His children. And He everywhere He went He left a picture of Himself with a message on the back: "*Whatever you've*

done, whatever you've become, it doesn't matter. Please come home."

In this sermon series, we've been exploring the basic beliefs of Methodism. Now, as Christians, we believe in grace. We believe everything we are, everything we have, and everything we will ever be is because God is a loving Heavenly Father who gives generously to His children. Friends, what would we be? What would we do without the grace of God? Now, as Methodists, we believe the grace of God is specifically expressed in three forms: Preventive Grace, Justifying Grace, and Sanctifying Grace! And this morning, I want to invite you to reflect with me on God's Preventive Grace!

So, what is Preventive Grace? Well, grace is God's unmerited, unearned, undeserved favor. Someone has said that grace is: *"When you get what you don't deserve."* But when we talk about Preventive Grace, we're talking about a specific kind of grace. The word *"preventive"* is a combination of two words: *"Pre"* which means *"before"* and *"veni"* which means *"to come."* So, Preventive Grace is: God's unmerited, unearned, undeserved blessing that comes before we are saved.

You see, we believe God was working in our lives before we became a Christian to bring us to Himself, to call us and woo us until we come to that place where we believed in Jesus as our Lord and Savior and accepted His death as the atonement for our sins. Jesus said it this way: **"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day."**

So, let's spend some time this morning reflecting on God's Prevenient Grace.

First, we were not created this way. Genesis 1:26 says: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness ...!'" So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." Humanity was created in the image and likeness of God. Now, that doesn't mean that God has a body with hands, feet, and hair like we do. It means we were created with the ability to think and reason and decide for ourselves. It means we were created morally pure, with a heart that wanted nothing but to please God.

But ... something happened, didn't it? We woke up and we weren't in Kansas anymore. It's like: Houston we have a problem!

And the problem is: we sin! Paul told the church at Rome: "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." We blow it; we mess it up every day. Even when we want to do good, good doesn't seem to be in us. Because the root of the problem is not that we sin; no, it's deeper than that. The root of the problem is: we are sinners! We're not sinners because we sin; we sin because we're sinners. We were born that way! Romans 5:12 says: "Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin." Paul says, *because one man sinned we were all born sinners, so we all sin.*

And so, sin has an immediate effect upon humanity. God said: "On the day that you eat from the fruit of the tree in the center of the garden, you will surely die," and so they did. When God came down from heaven to walk with Adam and Eve in the cool of the afternoon, these two

children who once had a heart that wanted nothing but to please their Father, went and hide themselves. They lost their purity; they lost their innocence. They lost part of their ability to think and reason and decide for themselves. And so, in Romans 3, Paul describes the condition of humanity: “None is righteous; no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one ... in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

And so, we've left the presence of God; we packed our bags, left a note, and left for what we thought was greener pastures. And friends, the really sad thing is that if it was left up to us, we'd stay gone. There's nothing in us that wants to go home. We're teenagers without a curfew, but everywhere we go, God has left a picture.

You see, God draws us to Himself! Jesus said: “No one can come to me unless the Father ... draws him.” The story of the Lost Sheep is about how the Good Shepherd leaves the 99 sheep safely in the fold and goes searching for the one lost sheep. It's the story of Maria and Christina; it's the story of the Father who goes searching for His two wayward children. It's your story and my story. It's the story of God's prevenient grace.

In 1963, the District Superintendent called a Lay Speaker named TA and asked him if he'd be willing to go to License to Preach School and serve the West Bainbridge Methodist Church. And TA went to West Bainbridge with his family in tow and they all joined the

church. And soon, they grew up and went on with their lives. And 20 years went by and a new pastor was assigned to West Bainbridge and he was going through the membership list and came across the name Lynne McDonald. And he asked people: who is Lynne McDonald and where in the world is she? And someone said: *“Oh, that’s the preacher’s daughter and she just lives across town.”* So, the pastor started sending the Church Bulletin to Lynne’s house and after a few weeks, a group from the church went to see her and invited her back to church. Well, it wasn’t long before Lynne called up her son and asked him to go to church with her. And I accepted her invitation and that’s my story of Prevenient Grace, God working in my life before I even knew it to draw me to Himself.

We all have a story like that, a story of God’s unmerited, unearned, undeserved blessing. Francis Thompson called Him, The Hound of Heaven. He’s the Unseen Guest, the voice that calls your name. And how you respond to His call makes all the difference in the world. Jesus said: **“No one comes to me unless the Father who sent me draws Him and I will raise him up in the last day.”**

You know, on a day like this, among people like us, there just might be someone here this morning who needs to answer that call. You’ve heard the voice; you’ve seen the pictures everywhere you go; now, it’s time to come home. Your Father is looking for you!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!

ⁱ Max Lucado, No Wonder They Call Him Savior