

Sermon: Methodist DNA: Justifying Grace
Text: Luke 15:20 – 24
Date: July 26, 2009 AM
Place: Jesup First UMC

She walked into my office and sat down in the chair across from me. She had been there several times before and every time she came, she was looking for something new to do. First, she volunteered to teach one of the children's Sunday School classes. Then, she quit that and decided God had "called" her to be a Greeter at the front door before the service began. Well, that lasted a few weeks, and then she volunteered to clean up the fellowship Hall after Wednesday night suppers, but she quit that too. So, I couldn't imagine what she wanted when she stepped into my office that morning.

And she said: "*Tucker, I finally know what God is calling me to do. I want to volunteer to serve on the Missions Committee.*" So, I said: "*Diane, what's up? Why do you keep volunteering to do all these things, but you never follow through?*" And she said: "*What do you mean?*" So, I listed them for her: the Sunday School class, the Greeter, and the clean up crew. And she got really quiet for a moment and then, her eyes filled with tears and she said: "*Tucker, have you ever just needed to know that God loves you?*"

Some would argue that the Parable of the Lost Son is the best story in the Bible. You remember it, right? A wayward child comes to his father and demands his share of the inheritance and he goes away to the far country where he wastes all the money and wakes up one day to find himself helpless and homeless, looking down at a trough of pig slop

and licking his lips. So, he decided to go home to his daddy, but he knew he didn't deserve to be welcomed home. So, he started rehearsing a speech for his daddy: *"Sir, I know I did you wrong and I don't deserve to be your son anymore, but please let me be your servant."*

Well, meanwhile, Daddy had developed a routine: every day Daddy went and sat on the porch and looked down the road toward the far country for any sign of his little boy. And every day, he was disappointed because the boy didn't come home, but this one particular day, as he sat there watching, he saw some movement on the horizon and immediately, he recognized that hair. Oh, it was a little messy and matted to his head, but there was no mistake about it; this was his baby boy. And suddenly, that old man dropped his cane and went running down the road toward his son, and he grabbed the boy in his arms. And the boy started his speech, *"Sir, I know ..."* but Daddy interrupted him; he said: *"My boy's home. My boy's home. Hey, somebody go kill the calf; we're going to have a party tonight. Look, go get my ring and put it on his finger and put the robe on his back, because my son who was dead is alive again; the one who was lost has been found."*

This morning, we're continuing our sermon series called Methodist DNA, looking at the basic beliefs of the United Methodist Church. Now, last Sunday, we talked about how our parents, Adam and Eve, packed their bags, left a note, and left home for the far country. Now, it's quite possible that we would have stayed there, living in a world of sin, totally separated

from God, except for God's grace. And as Methodists, we believe God's grace is expressed towards us in three very specific ways: Prevenient Grace, Justifying Grace, and Sanctifying Grace. Prevenient Grace is that grace which comes before our salvation. God comes looking for us, wooing us and calling us to Himself.

And once we answer God's call, once we turn to God in faith, God grants us more grace, Justifying Grace. Now, what is Justifying Grace? Well, Justifying Grace is that blessing of God by which we are placed in a right relationship with God. It simply means that things are made right between us and God, not because of something we do, but because of what God does on our behalf.

So, I want to point out to you four things God does in our lives through Justifying Grace.

First, we are Redeemed through Justifying Grace. Paul told the church at Rome: "By grace are you saved through faith." The idea here is that we, because of our brokenness and sinfulness, have become slaves to sin. In our fallen state, we cannot do anything but sin. Like Hosea's wife, Gomer, we are products on the slave market, but God loves us enough to redeem us. Through Jesus' death on the cross, our sin debt has been paid. Paul said it this way: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'"

Second, we are Recognized by Justifying Grace. Romans 8:15 says: "For you did not receive a

spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, and by Him, we cry ‘Abba, Father.’” When the Father saw movement on the horizon, He recognized His son. And even when the boy tried to pass himself off as a servant, the Father recognized him as a son. He didn’t get what he deserved; he was welcomed as a son.

One day a man came to see Watchman Nee. He said: “*No matter how much I pray, no matter how hard I try, I simply cannot seem to be faithful to the Lord.*” Nee said: “*Do you see this dog? This is my dog. He is house-trained; he never makes a mess; he always obeys me. He is just perfect. Now, out in the kitchen I have a baby boy. He makes a mess; he throws his food; he dirties his clothes. But he’s my heir and it is he who will inherit my estate.*”¹

We are recognized by grace.

Third, we are Released by Justifying Grace. Ephesians 1:7 says: “*In Him, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance to the riches of His grace.*” When the boy came home, all was forgiven. What he had done didn’t matter; the pain he had caused didn’t matter; the money he had wasted didn’t matter. He was released from his sins.

There was once a priest in the Philippines who was truly a man of God, but he was haunted by a secret sin he committed in seminary. Oh, he had repented, but he just didn’t feel forgiven. Well, in his church, there was a lady who claimed to communicate with the Lord in her dreams. So, one day the priest said: “*Next time you speak with Jesus, I want you to ask him about the secret sin I committed in*

seminary.” She agreed and a few days later, he asked her: “*Did Jesus visit you in your dreams?*” She said: “*Yes.*” He said: “*And did you ask Him about my secret sin?*” She said: “*Yes.*” He said: “*Well, what did He say?*” And the woman said: “*What sin?*” ⁱⁱ

We are released by grace.

Fourth, we are Restored by Justifying Grace. Paul told the church at Corinth: “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.*” God doesn’t just accept us back as children; he restores to us the benefits of childhood. When the younger son came home, the Father put a ring on his finger, shoes on his feet, and a robe on his back; and he threw a party for him. He totally restored his little boy and made everything new.

One day, Johnny and Susie were playing ball and Johnny wasn’t looking when he swung the bat and hit his sister in the forehead. Well, you can imagine what happened. Susie started screaming and crying, the blood started flowing, and Johnny started begging Susie not to tell mama. Now, at first he tried to ignore it. Then, he tried to cover it up by putting a baseball cap on her head. Then, he tried to clean it up by washing the blood away, but nothing worked. So, finally, he took Susie to mama. And mama took Susie to the hospital to get stitches and you know what? After that, you couldn’t even see a scar. You see, what couldn’t be ignored or covered up or washed away had been made new by the doctors. ⁱⁱⁱ

That’s grace! We are restored by grace.

And so, there sat Diane, burdened by deep desire to please God, struggling to find her place in the Kingdom by being good enough and doing all the right things. And still, she was miserable. And so, I reached over and took her by the hand and said: *“Diane, you can’t make God love you. God loves you. You don’t deserve it; you can’t earn it and yet, He really loves you. And all you have to do is accept it.”*

And we prayed together and you know what? That day, Diane left my office a different person. Her life was filled with joy and peace and she was able to find a new sense of fulfillment in the work of the church, because she realized for the first time that her relationship with God was something that God offered free of charge, with no strings attached. Now, that’s grace! Prevenient Grace! Justifying Grace! Sanctifying Grace!

Grace, Grace, God’s Grace, Grace that will pardon and cleanse within!

Grace, Grace, God’s Grace, Grace that is greater than all my sin!

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

i www.sermonillustrations.com

ii www.sermonillustrations.com

iii www.sermonillustrations.com