KEY VERSE

They only heard a report about me: “The man who used to harass us now preaches the faith that he once tried to destroy.” (CEB) — Galatians 1:23

SUGGESTED VERSES FOR WORSHIP:

Galatians 1:13-16, 23-24

KEY CONCEPT:

Just as God transformed Paul from persecutor to preacher through grace, by grace God will transform our lives and worldview.

CALLS TO WORSHIP

Call to Worship #1 (Responsive)

Leader: Grace and peace to you from God the Father!
People: Grace and peace to you from the Lord Jesus Christ!
Leader: The grace of God pervades every part of our lives!
People: Wherever God is present, there is grace!
Leader: God’s grace is a grace that transforms, powerfully shaping us into God’s own image.
People: We believe that God’s powerful grace is transforming and shaping our lives in this moment. Lord, help our unbelief.
Leader: Come! Worship! Give God praise and glory for Christ is alive, setting us free from the powers of brokenness and evil in this world!

Call to Worship #2 (Responsive)

Leader: Compassion is in this house!
People: We are thankful for Grace that Transforms.
Leader: Mercy is present to have free Course.
People: We are grateful, for mercy suits our case.
Leader: The spirit of healing is ready to comfort.
People: We give thanks that the Balm of Gilead continues to flow for us.
Leader: The time of praise and thanksgiving has arrived.
People: We have gathered to worship the God who provides Grace that Transforms.

Call to Worship #3 (Responsive)
Leader: Listen to the call of God:
People: God has made a new way in the wilderness for us into life.
Leader: Feel the movement of the Holy Spirit:
People: The Spirit is leading us in the ways of justice and hope.
Leader: Trust in the words of Jesus:
People: Christ is calling us into new life now, the promise of eternal life forever.
Leader: Come, follow the wisdom of God’s ways;
People: For God knows that the world will fail us, but God’s grace endures forever.

WELCOME/SPOKEN WORD INTRODUCTION

It is the Sunday after Easter! The Easter eggs have been found and eaten. The new Easter clothes have been soiled and washed. Easter baskets and Easter bunnies have been put away for another year. Easter’s over. Or is it?

Just as we might spend the 40 days before Easter (which we know as Lent) to prepare for Easter, the church has traditionally spent the 50 days after Easter (which is called Eastertide) celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ! After all – Easter changes everything!

And, while we like to say, “Easter changes everything,” it is probably more accurate to say “Grace changes everything.” Right? It’s God’s grace – present at the resurrection and available to us today – that changes everything.

So, we are going to spend the next 6 weeks with the New Testament book of Galatians, a letter from the apostle Paul to the Christian community that he had founded, a letter that our Bishop Palmer has coined “a Gospel of Grace.” Today, as we begin at the beginning, we’ll hear Paul’s story of God’s transforming grace; we’ll consider how transformation doesn’t happen overnight; and we’ll find ourselves challenged to claim the transformative power of grace in our lives and in the lives of those we might write off or resist bringing under the grace of Jesus Christ.

In these days of Eastertide, let us immerse ourselves in the undeserved, unmerited, loving action of God. Grace. Grace that changes everything. Grace that transforms...

PRAYERS, LITANIES, ETC.

Opening Prayer
Healing and compassionate God,
whose hands hold gently all creation,
whose touch brings life in the face of death,
whose love transforms destruction into grace.
Touch our lives with your Spirit, bringing new life and hope,
so that we may live and serve you with joy and praise.
In the name of our Risen Savior, we pray. Amen
Prayer of Illumination

Holy God, author of the Word made flesh,
scribe inspiring the pen of your Apostle Paul:
open us to your Spirit,
that as scripture is spoken and your Word proclaimed,
your grace may transform, clothe, form, and sustain us
that we may bear the fruit of your perfect love
to the glory of Jesus Christ,
in whose name we pray. Amen.

[UM Worship & Song Worship Resource, #75, adapted for this series]

Statement of Faith

We are children of God:
  We have been water-washed and Spirit-filled.
  We’re dead to sin and alive in Christ.
  We’re done with law, and live under grace.
  Our hearts are set on righteousness.
  Our minds are fixed on life and peace.
  Suffering is nothing, compared to the glory to come.
  For we’re heirs to the life Christ is bringing!

We are children of God!

[UM Worship & Song Worship Resource, #75, adapted for this series]

Prayer of Confession

Holy God, we confess that we have our own thoughts and ideas about what is right and wrong with this world, with others around us, and with our church. We call them our opinions, when in fact, we are really judging the words and actions of others. We say that we believe in grace and that your grace is for everyone, and then our actions reveal that we don’t always live what we say we believe. We hear a family member tell us that they have had an abortion and we feel a judgment in our heart, while trying to find a word of grace. We watch a friend we dearly love, go into rehab again and again trying to get free from an opioid addiction and we feel both helpless and frustrated as we search for grace. We are confronted with those whose beliefs differ from our own and trying to bridge the gap of the tension between us is more work than we want to do. We forsake offering grace in the midst of the tension.

Honestly God, what we want is to be forgiven, shout out our sins and receive your healing grace. And more than that, we want to be more like Christ, a person of deep faith and grace, so that we are less judgmental and more compassionate with those who, like us, need your transforming grace.

Pour out upon us your holiness. Pursue us with your love. Fill us with a grace that transforms, so that we will live in Christ and be a servant of Christ in this world. Amen.

Great Thanksgiving

See Week 2 Worship Helps for a Gospel of Grace/Eastertide Great Thanksgiving.
Sending Forth/Benediction #1

May the grace of God pursue you.
May the grace of God restore you.
May the grace of God transform you as only grace can do.
May the grace of God convince you, in every situation, to love.
Go now to love others, even as Christ loves you.

[UM Worship & Song Worship Resource, #176, adapted]

Sending Forth/Benediction #2

Go into the world with compassion.
We leave to be compassionate to all we meet.
Go into world with mercy.
We will be merciful to even the unmerciful. We ask God’s help.
Go into the world ready to offer Grace that Transforms.
We leave to do the greater works in the name of the Risen One who calls us to go, Jesus Christ!
Hallelujah and Amen.

CREATIVE ELEMENTS

Hymns

Amazing Grace - UMH 378
Change My Heart, O God - TFWS 2152
Christ is Alive! - UMH 318 [Eastertide]
Christ Has Risen – TFWS 2115 [Eastertide]
Have Thine Own Way, Lord - UMH 382
I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me - TFWS 2153
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling - UMH 384
O Spirit of the Living God - UMH 539
Since Jesus Came into My Heart - TFWS 2140
The Summons - TFWS 2130
Whom Shall I Send? - UMH 582

Contemporary Music Themes

Prevenient grace, justifying grace, sanctifying grace, “telling our story”, called to God’s mission, personal holiness, resurrection, new life

Eastertide symbol

The Butterfly – one of the traditional symbols of Easter is the butterfly, its metamorphosis a metaphor, not only for the resurrection of Jesus, but for the transformation that God’s grace enables within our lives. Consider incorporating the butterfly into worship on this first Sunday of Eastertide in one or more of the following ways:

• Incorporate butterflies into the worship setting (altar design)
• Use the butterfly as a teaching illustration in a Children’s Moment or in the sermon
• Distribute butterfly-inspired note pages during prayer time and invite folks to write down where they are inviting God’s transforming grace to work in their life in the coming weeks. Suggest that they keep that with them (in their Bible, in a wallet) and be diligent in praying to know God’s transforming grace.

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