KEY VERSE

James, Cephas, and John, who are considered to be key leaders, shook hands with me and Barnabas as equals when they recognized the grace that was given to me. So it was agreed that we would go to the Gentiles, while they continue to go to the people who were circumcised. They asked only that we would remember the poor, which was certainly something I was willing to do. — Galatians 2:9-10 (CEB)

SUGGESTED VERSES FOR WORSHIP

Galatians 2:9-10

KEY CONCEPT

When we recognize the grace of God given to others, even in our differences, we are able to continue and expand our ministry reach because of our differences. When we recognize it is God who acts, we are invited to respond.

SERMON HELPS

The leading authority figures in the Jerusalem church give Paul his assignment to minister to the Gentiles (vs. 9a.)

Your assignment, should you choose to accept it...

• Consider setting the stage for this message by highlighting the challenge before the Galatian converts: Will they follow the Law and be circumcised, or will they see that God's grace has met them where they are and invited them into a new community?

• What challenges are facing the congregation? With care, identify the places you don’t always agree. Then, point people to how Jesus is leading the way by the “assignments” you have to minister in your community.

• Keep Jesus at the center of the message, not the congregation.
James, Peter, and John recognize the grace given to Paul (vs. 9b.)

Jesus shows up and shows off

- How is God’s grace showing up today?

Agree to care for the poor. This was a mark of Jewish piety as well as an act of solidarity between the Gentile and Jerusalem church (vs. 10).

Because of Jesus, we embrace...

- Consider how the integrity of the gospel is embodied in the actions of your local church. Who is included? excluded?
- What challenge can you offer? What encouragement can you provide as you preach? While you consider this, keep the focus on how Jesus is moving in and through the congregation. Stay centered on how God’s grace is eliciting a response to be examples of grace that embraces. See illustration below.
- Finish this statement: Because of Jesus, we embrace…

Practical:

- Where is Jesus on the move in daily life?
- Busyness and abiding by church rules do not earn salvation.
- Caring for the poor is a response to the grace we receive, not a condition of it.

Personal Connection/Illustration:

The Embracing Cross of Christ

The history of apartheid in South Africa is well known. For years, apartheid separated people. One church, recognizing the pain and history of the community where it was situated sought to communicate a message of God’s embrace to all who visited. Calvary Methodist Church, in Midrand, South Africa, sits atop a hill, overlooking two different communities.

As you approach the church, you are greeted by a large, stone cross towering over all who pass by. In a land that was defined by exclusion and separation, the Embracing Cross of Christ is a sign of hope and healing.

The cross, designed by Hans Willek and Alan Storey, was erected in 1999. Alan Storey writes, “This cross is shaped to express God’s loving embrace of the world in the death of Jesus. The left arm is raised higher and extends further than the right arm because it is the extension of the heart, reminding us that Jesus’ heart was given in obedience to the Father in his work of boundless loving. The left arm is also the arm of the outcast, reminding us that Jesus came to raise the lowly and poor. The shortened right arm symbolizes the powerful who are humbled and brought low, as prophesied by Mary in Luke 1:51-53.”

The ministries of the church reflected this embrace. Their four pillars of mission: spirituality, evangelism and church growth, justice and service, and development and economic empowerment. These four pillars reflected the needs of the community and the grace they experienced in the life transforming work of Jesus.

[NOTE: if you are using these Eastertide Symbols during worship, invite the congregation to come in their “Easter outfits” again next week.]