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)

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. When we recognize it is God who acts, we are invited to respond.

CALLS TO WORSHIP

Call to Worship #1 (Responsive)

Leader: Praise the Lord with all that you have!

People: Praise and trust in the Lord with all your heart and soul!

Leader: For God is with us throughout all our lives.

People: God’s loving presence surrounds us and comforts us in times of trouble.

Leader: Rejoice in the Lord at all times, in all places.

People: For God with steadfast and loving to us all. AMEN.

Call to Worship #2

With all our heart, we take refuge in God most high, who created all things, the merciful Father, Source of all goodness.

With all our heart, we take refuge in Christ, the Redeemer from sin, who restores our true nature, the perfect and mysterious Word.

With all our heart, we take refuge in the One who embraces the universe, who at all times and in all places responds to our needs, the pure and tranquil Holy Spirit.

[UM Book of Worship, #457]

1https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/3910/worship-connection-june-5-2016
**Call to Worship #3 (Responsive)**

**Leader:** We meet in different buildings, in different towns.

**People:** We speak different languages and sing different hymns.

**Leader:** We wear different clothing and have different gifts and talents.

**People:** Yet, as we gather together for worship on Sundays, we become one body, one family in Christ.

**Leader:** We join together on one journey,

**People:** the journey to unite with the Risen Christ.

**Leader:** We join together with God as the Kingdom of God comes and as God’s will is done.

**People:** Let us join with all our brothers and sisters in worship and true communion with God this day. Amen.

[UM Worship & Song Worship Resource, #68]

**WELCOME/SPOKEN WORD INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to our second week of exploring Galatians: A Gospel of Grace. As we go through these weeks after Easter, celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are also exploring together the foundational nature of this undeserved, unmerited, loving action of God that we call grace.

Last week we celebrated that “grace changes everything!” The transformational nature of grace seeks us out, puts us into right relationship with God, and then continually shapes us more and more into the likeness of Christ. Grace is transformational.

But here’s the thing – God’s grace doesn’t transform us into carbon copies of one another with the same gifts, the same call, or even the same ways to practice our faith. Even while saved by grace through faith, we are unique individuals who each have a unique function in the body of Christ. What I can do, you may not be able to do. And where you are called to go to one place, your neighbor may be called elsewhere. But it can be difficult to recognize the grace of God in another when we are different, difficult to embrace the way they live out their faith when it is different from how we live it out.

Today we find ourselves in the second chapter of Galatians, and Paul’s accounting of his meetings in Jerusalem with the pillars of the early church, Jesus’ first disciples. Paul knows that he has been called to take the Gospel of Grace beyond the Jewish people. And we learn that grace allows us to recognize the grace of God given to others, even when it looks different. And when we embrace this diversity of grace, it enables and expands our ministry reach. God’s grace enables us to embrace Christ, embrace our new identity in Christ, and embrace one another including our differences. It is a grace that embraces.

**PRAYERS, LITANIES, ETC.**

**Opening Prayer #1**

Creator God, Author of Life,

*in whose divine image we are made –*

individual, unique, different, yet also in the image of You.

Open the eyes of our heart to see your image and recognize your grace in each person we meet,

that we might take your good news to all your creation.

In the name of our Risen Savior we pray. Amen.
Opening Prayer #2

God our Mother and Father, we come to you as children.
Be with us as we learn to see one another with new eyes,
hear one another with new hearts,
and treat one another in a new way. Amen.

[UM Book of Worship, #466]

Passing the Peace

On this communion Sunday, consider practicing a traditional “passing of the peace” with a “grace that embraces” twist, as you prepare to come to the Table. Just as James, Cephas (Peter), and John shook hands with Paul and Barnabas, invite the members of the congregation to pass the peace by shaking hands and exchanging the greeting:
“The Christ in me greets the Christ in you.”

Prayer of Illumination

Holy God,

author of the Word made flesh,
scribe holding 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

Almighty and all-loving God,
through your Son Jesus Christ,
you have reconciled the world to yourself.
Help us now to be reconciled with one another,
that again we might dwell in the warmth of your love.
Inspire us with your Holy Spirit
to put aside the cloak of pride and put on Christ,
that we might forgive and be forgiven;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
Great Thanksgiving

This Great Thanksgiving is an adaptation of THE GREAT THANKSGIVING FOR EASTER DAY OR SEASON, United Methodist Book of Worship pp. 66-67, may be used in conjunction with A SERVICE OF WORD AND TABLE II in the United Methodist Hymnal. Responses are on pp 13-14.

Leader: The Lord be with you.
People: And also with you
Leader: Lift up your hearts.
People: We lift them up to the Lord.
Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Leader: It is right, and a good and joyful thing,
always and everywhere, to give thanks to you,
Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth.
You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life.
When we turned away, and our love failed,
your love and grace remained steadfast.
You delivered us from captivity,
made covenant to be our sovereign God,
and set before us the way of life.
And so, with your people on earth,
and all the company of heaven,
we praise your name and join their unending hymn.

People: Holy, holy, holy Lord, …

Leader: Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ.
By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection
you gave birth to your Church,
delivered us from slavery to sin and death,
and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.
By your grace and mercy we have been born anew to a living hope,
cleansed by the same water and Spirit,
clothed in Christ Jesus,
and given an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.
Once we were no people, but now we are your people,
bearing the fruit of your Spirit,
declaring your wonderful deeds in Christ,
who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.
On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said:

“Take, eat, this is the bread of life, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

When the supper was over he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:

“Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

On the day you raised him from the dead, he was recognized by his disciples in the breaking of the bread, and, in the power of your Holy Spirit, your Church has continued in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup. And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ’s offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

People: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Leader: Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and cup. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood. By your Spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to the world, until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at the heavenly banquet. Through Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and forever more.

People: Amen.

Sending Forth/Benediction #1

May the grace of God transform you. May the grace of God embrace you. May the grace of God stand with you through the challenges ahead. 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

Brothers and sisters in Christ, for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord (Ephesians 2:8)

CREATIVE ELEMENTS

Hymns

- All Praise to Our Redeeming Lord – UMH 554
- Blessed Assurance - UMH 369
- Blest Be the Dear Uniting Love – UMH 566
- Christ for the World We Sing – UMH 568
- Come, Sinners, to the Gospel Feast – UMH 616
- Gather Us In – TFWS 2236
- Grace Alone - TFWS 2162
- He Lives! – UMH 310 [Eastertide]
- Help Us Accept Each Other – UMH 560
- Jesus, United by Thy Grace – UMH 561
- Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service – UMH 581
- Lord You Give the Great Commission – UMH 584
- Many Gifts, One Spirit – UMH 114
- O Church of God, United – UMH 547
- O How He Loves You and Me – TFWS 2108
- The Bread of Life for All is Broken – UMH 633
- There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy – UMH 121
- We Are the Church – UMH 558

Contemporary Music Themes

Unity in Christ, nature of the church, called to God’s mission, grace, personal holiness

Eastertide Symbol

The cross – one of the most recognizable symbols of Easter (and perhaps the only one that does not come from cultural traditions), the cross reminds us of Jesus crucifixion and resurrection for all of God’s children.

An embrace can begin with someone standing tall, arms wide open in invitation, creating a silhouette of a cross. You might even say that Jesus’ posture on the cross, with arms wide open, was grace that was embracing all of God’s creation. This standing-tall, arms-wide-open posture and its meaning can be the genesis of a Children’s Moment. It might be a posture that the preacher uses at relevant times during the sermon. It might even be a posture that the congregation is invited to try, as able, during a time of prayer, especially a Prayers of the People.

Hot cross buns are a tradition in various regions of the globe as part of the Easter celebration. Consider having some available as a treat for the congregation this Eastertide.

The Embracing Cross of Christ (http://calvary.org.za/)

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 Wilreker 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.]