



CASCADIAN WEEKLY

A MESSAGE FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Cascade Christian Church,

We are in the last two weeks of the season of Lent and we have spent the last four weeks looking at the amazing grace of God in the lives of people in scripture, as well as in our own lives. As we have reflected with Isaiah, we have seen God's grace to the despairing. In Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son we have seen God's grace to the lost. In the story of Jesus healing the blind man we see God's grace to the blind, and in Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well we see God's grace for the ashamed. My sermon last Sunday was on God's grace for the wretched and the transformation of Saul to become the Apostle Paul. We will look further at God's grace in the worship services of Holy Week.

How do you view God's grace? Do you ask for it, claim it, live in it, or do you think it is only for the "good" people, not for a person like you? John Newton, the writer of the hymn "Amazing Grace" had to learn that grace over time. The "hour he first believed" was when the ship he was captaining almost sank in a storm in the North Atlantic. He prayed for the first time since childhood, asking God for deliverance, and the ship was spared. But it took more time for Newton to be completely transformed. He continued in the business of enslaving people for some time, and during that time the Holy Spirit shaped him and changed him to repent of his sins until he gave up the slave trade and became engaged in other shipping work. It took even longer for him to become a pastor and a writer of hymns.

Transformation and change can take time, and there is no hurrying of God's time table. Maybe you have been asking God for change – for change in your own life or to change the life of someone you care about. God hears those prayers, and God is always on the move. God has a plan, and God's plans are always good and worth waiting for. Sometimes we dread change and want things to remain the same, other times change cannot come quickly enough. I urge you to leave that timing with God, to trust in His grace which is freely given, and to trust the movement of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit is at work.

It seems like spring is taking a long time to come to West Michigan – the snow, freezing rain, and sleet can make it feel like we are in November, not the beginning of April. But the signs of spring are all around us in the growth of plants, in the activities of the animals we see, and in the glimpses we get of sunshine. Spring will come, change will happen. And just as God controls the season around us, God will allow change to occur in our hearts, minds, and lives, in just the way God has planned for us. I close this letter with a reminder of the Keeper of the Seasons, and may God be with you in these last days of Lent.

Keep the faith, Jill

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

WEEKLY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

SUNDAY | 4/2

Contemporary Worship | 9:30am (Sanctuary)
Pre-K–5th Grade Sunday School | 9:30am
First Sunday Coffee Hour | 10:30am-12:30pm (Coffee House)
Traditional Worship | 11:00am (Chapel)
Middle & High School Sunday School | 11:00am
Alcoholics Anonymous | 7:00 pm

MONDAY | 4/3

Alcoholics Anonymous | 8:00pm

TUESDAY | 4/4

Women's Bible Study | 9:00am (Rm. 112)
Senior Exercise Class | 1:00pm
Worship Committee Meeting | 5:30pm

WEDNESDAY | 4/5

Men's Bible Study | 6:30am (Coffee House)
Wednesday Jubilee | 4:30-6:00pm
Wednesday Night Lenten Bible Study | 6:30pm
Youth Group | 6:30pm
Boy Scouts | 7:00pm
Alcoholics Anonymous | 8:00pm

THURSDAY | 4/6

Grief Share | 10:00am (Coffee House)
Gospel of John Study | 10:30am (Rm. 112)
Senior Exercise Class | 1:00pm
Cub Scouts | 6:00pm
Maundy Thursday Service | 6:30pm (Sanctuary)
Easter Choir Rehearsal | 7:30pm (Sanctuary)
Al-Anon | 8:00pm

FRIDAY | 4/7

Church Office Closed
Jesus Laughing Talk Group | 7:30am

SUNDAY WORSHIP

ATTENDANCE:

In-Person: 160

Website: 47 Households

FINANCIAL GIVING for the week ending

on 3/26/2023:

Budgeted: \$10,652

Given: \$8,082.47

GENERAL NEWS

WEEK OF COMPASSION LENTEN OFFERINGS

During the season of Lent (the 40 days before Easter) Cascade Christian Church urges all of our friends and members to live a little more sacrificially so you can do something more for those in need through Week of Compassion, our Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) disaster and poverty fund. Week of Compassion offerings will be collected on Maundy Thursday, April 6, or Easter Sunday, April 9.

POP UP EASTER CHOIR

THURSDAY, MARCH 30 at 6:30pm | THURSDAY, APRIL 6 at 7:30pm

We will be putting together a choir to help lead our Easter Sunday worship. If you're interested in singing, please plan to attend our two rehearsals on Thursday, March 30 at 6:30pm and Thursday, April 6 at 7:30pm (following the Maundy Thursday Service) in the Sanctuary!

COFFEE HOUR FELLOWSHIP

SUNDAY, APRIL 2 | Between & After Services

Join us in the church coffee house for fellowship over coffee and treats between and after worship services on the first Sunday of each month. This month, Board Chair Jeff Van Strien and Vice-Chair Dana Froumis will also be available for questions and discussion about the Ethical Guidelines for Congregational Conduct we're adopting as a church in our pastoral search process.

HOLY WEEK SERVICES

PALM SUNDAY, APRIL 2 | 9:30 & 11:00am

Palm branches and palm crosses will be shared, and we'll look at God's amazing grace in the life of Peter in a sermon titled "Grace for the Faithful, Grace for the Fearful" The coffee house will be open for fellowship between the services and after the 11:00 service. Board Chairperson Jeff Van Strien and Vice Chairperson Dana Froumis will be in the coffee house for any questions you have on the Ethical Guidelines for Congregations document.

MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 6 | 6:30pm

Join us for communion, quiet meditation, and a look at God's grace in the life of Jesus' disciple John. The events of the Last Supper, Jesus' prayer in the garden, and His arrest will be shared by a scripture chorus. There will be optional stations during the service for foot washing for those who would like to experience this, and stations for offering and prayer.

GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 7 | 12:00pm

Cascade Christian will host the Forest Hills area churches in our ecumenical Good Friday service. Our offering will be for ACCESS-6. The crucifixion of Jesus will be shared in art and music, and we will look at God's grace to the penitent thief who died at the side of Jesus.

EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 9 | 9:30 & 11:00am

Easter is our great day of celebration! Join us at 9:30 or 11:00 to worship Christ the Risen Lord. We will have special music and we will see how God's grace is for all people in the story of Mary Magdalene. If you purchased an Easter lily, thank you! You may take your lily home after worship or leave it at church to be brought to someone who can no longer drive to church. Christ the Lord is risen – He is risen indeed!

MEALS ON WHEELS

We need 3-4 drivers for Meals on Wheels to bring prepared meals to seniors in our area. We deliver on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings and it takes approximately 2-3 hours. Every 90 days sign up for which days you can deliver. There are no meetings, just lots of personal contact with very thankful people. Anyone interested can call Martha Irwin at 616-706-2152.

NEW CHURCH DIRECTORY

This spring the church will be producing a new church directory, and we are calling on all church members and friends to get their photographs taken to be included in the directory. There will be a station set up at church through Easter for photos and to check/update your information. If you are unable to come to church in person call in your updated information to the church office.

NEW WEDNESDAY NIGHT STUDY: JESUS' FAREWELL MESSAGE **WEDNESDAYS STARTING APRIL 12 | 6:30pm**

On Wednesday, April 12 we will begin a new study on Jesus' Farewell Message, using videos and a study guide written by Francis Chan. This will be a five or six week study looking at Jesus' instructions to the disciples and to us in John 13-17. We will also study Jesus' Ascension and Pentecost Day. All are welcomed to this study, and there are no materials to buy. Join us on Wednesdays from 6:30-8:00pm in the adult classroom on the second floor of the education building.

JAIL MINISTRY RESUMES

On Monday, April 3, 1000 bags of God's grace will be delivered to Kent County Jail to be shared with the inmates. Each bag contains candy, a devotional, a stamped Easter card to be sent by the inmate, and a homemade card from our congregation. This ministry began in the 1980s and after a three-year hiatus due to the pandemic, we rejoice that we can share the love of God with Kent County Jail through the jail chaplains. Many thanks to Diane Phelps and the Social Action Mission Outreach committee, the Wednesday night Bible study, the Monday morning stamp crew led by Carol Tiemeyer, and to all others who helped pull this ministry together at short notice. Please keep the inmates and the jail chaplains in your prayers.

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

SONSHINE STORE

There's only a little over a week left for kids to earn Sunshine Points; Easter is right around the corner! Be sure to encourage kids in their acts of kindness, Lenten devotionals, and Week of Compassion donation boxes. **On the day of the Easter Sunshine Store, kids will be in Centennial Hall the entire service.**

ATTENDANCE
for the week
ending on 03.26.23:

Elementary S.S.: 11
Wednesday Jubilee: 1
Youth Group: 8
Youth S.S.: 5

YOUNG FAMILIES ZOO TRIP

SATURDAY, APRIL 15 | 9:00am-12:00pm

On Saturday, April 15, families with Children Birth through 5th grade are invited to a morning (9:00am-12:00pm) at the John Ball Zoo! Tickets can be purchased in advance from John Ball Zoo's website. If your family would like to attend, please [click here](#) to fill out a short questionnaire. We're so excited to build up our Young Families ministry, and we hope you'll join us. If your family has not gotten an email about this event, please contact Adam Carlson (acarlson@cascadechristian.com) to be put on the Young Families mailing list.

YOUTH MINISTRY

MEMBERSHIP CLASS

THURSDAYS, APRIL 13, 20, 27 | 6:30-8:00pm

We will be having a Church Membership Class for our youth on Thursdays, April 13, 20, and 27. During the class, we'll highlight the foundations of the faith – who God is, what the Bible is, and what the Church is. At the end of the class, students can choose to be baptized during a following Sunday worship service. If you know a student who may be interested in joining us, send a message to Adam Carlson (acarlson@cascadechristian.com).

CAMP CRYSTAL 2023

- **June 18-23 | Elementary Camp**
- **June 23-25 | Young Adult Retreat**
- **June 27-29 | Day Camp**
(this can include overnight camp for grandparents and grandkids, parents and children)
- **July 9-15 | Middle School and High School Camp**
- **July 16-21 | Family Camp**
- **August 10-13 | Beloved Community Family Camp**
- **Retreats for men and women in August and September.**

Registration for Camp Crystal is now open!

To get more information and register, contact the church office or [click here](#).



Want to go to camp, but it doesn't quite fit in the budget this summer?

We have scholarships for that! Everyone should have the opportunity to experience Camp Crystal. Contact Michael Dirksen for more information or to request scholarship assistance.

FRUITFULL FAITH: 2023 CAMP THEME

Paul's letter to the church in Galatia will come alive as we explore the Fruit of the Spirit. Seeing this fruit all around assures us we have encountered God. We will see how these same fruit flow freely from us when we walk in the Spirit.



03.26.23 SERMON: GRACE FOR THE WRETCHED

If your life seems directionless, uncertain, or in any way wretched – pay attention, there is good news for you today. This Lenten season we've been grateful for the grace of God – and we've seen what scripture has to say about grace for the despairing, grace for the lost, grace for the blind, and grace for the ashamed. Grace has been described as God's riches at Christ's expense, and it has also been defined as getting what you do not deserve. The grace God given to us through Jesus is ours for the asking, and it there for all who feel wretched. So take heart, if you're unhappy or if you've behaved badly - God is here for all who feel wretched.

This Lenten season we've been looking at the words to the hymn Amazing Grace, which was written by the English sea captain, John Newton. Newton was in the business of transporting enslaved people from African countries to the Americas. But then he encountered God's grace, and was so deeply changed that he wrote one of the best loved songs of all time – Amazing Grace. The lyrics to Amazing Grace touch us deeply, and have been used in movies as diverse as School of Rock, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, and Coal Miner's Daughter. It is played at funerals, has been sung by Presidents, this song has been used in protests and has been used to bring divided people into unity.

03.26.23 SERMON CONTINUED

The hymn Amazing Grace endures because it speaks so honestly into the human condition, and acknowledges that we are all sinners in need of grace. John Newton described himself as a sinful wretch as he repented of what he had done to enslave people. Wretch is an interesting word, it can mean an unfortunate or unhappy person, and it can also mean a villain, a scoundrel, a despicable and contemptible person. Newton knew he was all of these things. And yet, even he, with all of his wretched sin, could receive God's grace. It completely changed him, and Newton became a minister, and worked to abolish slavery. This wretched man was saved by grace, and Newton is not the only one who was wretched, today we'll look at God's grace to Paul, who, like Newton, went from being despicable to a being a messenger of God's grace.

Paul, originally called Saul, was a Pharisee, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born to Hebrews, and in his time and culture this meant he was a man with influence, credentials, and pedigree. He knew the law of his people, he knew what was right and what was blasphemy, and he hated what he saw happening around him. People were following a rabbi named Jesus and a new Way of faith had begun. These followers called themselves Christians, and saw themselves as free from the law of the Old Testament, freed by the grace of God through Jesus, the Christ. Saul would have none of it. The sacred law was being upended, all he was, all he valued was threatened by this Jesus, a man who had been crucified by Rome at the urging of the Pharisees. Now his disciples said Jesus had risen from the dead. Saul saw the power of this dead man, and this movement had to be stopped. And Paul approved of stopping these Christians by any means possible.

One of the early followers of Jesus was a young man named Stephen, a man full of God's power and grace. He did great wonders and miraculous signs as a Christian. Saul and the religious authorities, wouldn't stand for this, and they brought about Stephen's execution. Acts 7:58 says: **When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul.**

Stephen was the first Christian martyr, he was killed because he was a Christian, and Acts 8:1 tells us **And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.** What a wretch, such a despicable thing to do, to watch approvingly as a young man is killed in a horrific way. And Stephen wasn't alone, many Christians were persecuted – Saul was out to scourge, ban, and excommunicate Christ's followers everywhere he could, so he planned a trip to the city of Damascus to destroy Christians. Read with me Acts 9:1-19 - Saul's Conversion:

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

03.26.23 SERMON CONTINUED

But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul was deeply moved by this experience on the Damascus road. He heard the voice of Jesus Christ, and rather than words of condemnation, this was a call of grace, a call to change, a call to a totally new life. All that Saul had done in his zealous persecutions made one thing clear on as he lay in the dust on the road to Damascus – Christians weren’t the problem, he was. He had been blind to the truth, blind in his ambition, blinded by his pride. He saw the light of Jesus, and it blinded him. And in this blindness, he began to see his wretched state.

Saul encountered the very Christ he had hated, and imagine his wretchedness. He had gotten everything wrong about Jesus! Have you ever had a moment where your own wretched state was suddenly revealed to you? Have you ever discovered how terribly wrong you were? But then Jesus does for Saul what He does for all who follow Him – Jesus pours grace into this moment, and He poured grace through out Paul’s life. The Saul-Paul name change is worth looking at a moment. The name “Saul” means prayed for, wanted, desired. And how God must have wanted and desired for this man to know and share grace. We know others pray for Saul as he becomes Paul. And “Paul” means little, or humble. A fitting name change as the pride of Saul gives way to the humility of Paul. Paul became little, small, and willing to put himself aside to help others see the greatness of the grace of Jesus.

Paul wrote in I Corinthians 15: 9-10 **For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.** God had other things in mind, a bigger plan for the man who once tried to destroy the church. And the grace given to Paul demonstrates how far and how deep Christ is willing to go for wretched people. This completely changed Saul to become Paul, he gave up what he had been, and became who God intended him to be. He was God’s chosen instrument for this work, to carry the good news of Jesus to the Gentiles, to kings, to the people of Israel.

Ananias heard God’s call to go to Saul, and naturally he was reluctant. Saul’s reputation was well known among Christians, maybe Ananias thought Saul was coming for him, and now God says go to Saul?! And maybe you share that reluctance, you might know that feeling of “Here I am God, but please, please, please don’t send me.” It is hard to go to our enemies. It is very hard to show grace to those who have wounded us. And Ananias was told, to go anyway, and he obeyed. Think of the moment when Ananias and Saul meet, Saul had been blinded, he has had the humbling experience of needing to be led by hand, he hasn’t eaten or had anything to drink for three days. Three days of blindness, dependency, wretchedness, wondering, realizing, rethinking, repenting.

And then hearing someone coming in to his room, and hearing a voice, I imagine a gentle voice, saying “Brother Saul”. Again this is not a voice condemning him, this person invites Saul to kinship, to family, to oneness in Christ. Ananias calls Saul “brother”, and lets Saul know that he was sent by Jesus himself to help Saul see and be filled with the Holy Spirit. And Saul’s eyes are opened, his blindness is gone, and he can

03.26.23 SERMON CONTINUED

see, not only with his eyes, but with his heart and soul, and he is a changed man. The name change to Paul comes in chapter 13, but the heart change has happened here. God's grace through Jesus Christ changed yet another wretched person. The suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus become Paul's new proclamation, and instead of cursing, and causing suffering to the followers of Christ, Paul joins Christ in His suffering. As the Lord had said – Paul will suffer much for the name of Jesus. The man who had breathed out murderous threats became a man of humility, love, mercy, and peace. This, friends, is simply grace. This is the power of God's grace.

Paul is us and we are Paul. Lent is the season when we confess our own account of sin, our great many sins. We don't want to admit this – but in our own ways we have persecuted others, we have looked away from the suffering around us, and we won't admit we have added to the pain of another person. We try to let ourselves off the hook for the wrongs we have done, and we ignore what Dana told us in his portrayal of Paul – that God wanted Paul to know as God wants the world to know, that leaving anyone out of the invitation to grace is not an option. And then, like Paul, somewhere on our road, we are stopped by the light, we meet Jesus, we see our sin, and we recognize how much we need His grace. It is very humbling. It is the only option to go forward, to live in the light of Christ.

A man who understood God's grace was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was a German theologian, who like Stephen and the Apostle Paul, died as a martyr for his faith in Jesus Christ. In his short life, Bonhoeffer left his mark in his writings and in his work to stop the evil of the Nazi regime. Bonhoeffer had much to say about God's grace -he wrote that cheap grace is the mortal enemy of our church. In short, cheap grace is grace without Jesus – and grace without Jesus is no grace at all. Bonhoeffer said: "If left unchecked, those who believe in cheap grace will miss the call to follow Jesus for that believer has placed cheap grace in place of God himself. This believer will live as a worldling and obey Jesus' commands not."

Friends, don't be fooled by cheap grace, it can never take the place of real grace. Cheap grace is forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, it is no grace at all because it is grace without Jesus Christ.

Our struggle today is for **costly grace**. Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it - a person will gladly go and sell all that they have. Costly grace is part of the Kingdom of God, it is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. Bonhoeffer wrote that costly grace "is the kingly rule of Christ, of whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble; it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him. Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock."

Costly grace is free for the asking, and it requires a daily submission to God. As Bonhoeffer said, "Every call of Jesus is a call to death." And he is right, it is a death to self, and an opportunity to pick up your cross and follow Jesus, to the cross, to the grave, and then out the other side. The call of Jesus is a call to the death of evil and self-centeredness, and an invitation to real life.

To the Paul's and Saul's in the world, this is humbling and astonishing. To the repentant sea captain John Newton, this sounds amazing. This grace is there for every one of us, all of us who are directionless, filled with sin, unhappy, uncertain, or in any way wretched. As Newton wrote: "Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." Friends, join the mighty chorus of Newton's hymn – because wretches like us are invited to the song, we are invited to the Table, we are invited to the Kingdom, we are given life and freedom. We are wretched no more. That is amazing grace. Amen and amen.