

“Amazing Grace.” – September 10, 2017  
by Wayne J. Schneider – Soli Deo Gloria

## “Amazing Grace.”

St. John 3:1-10

In high school, I was a member of my high school’s cross-country team. As a young man, I took up jogging. For years I loved jogging, even though it often meant running in pain. I discovered that if I concentrated on something other than the pain, the pain did not disappear, but my awareness of it lessened.

Running and jogging can be a metaphor for the work of the Holy Spirit. We all have troubles in our lives, or in our families or with friends. The Spirit of God helps us with this pain. It is not the function of the Holy Spirit to remove the pain. As a *“Follower of the Way,”* we are never promised hassle free lives. But, the Holy Spirit assists us in focusing on other things, so we can learn in our suffering and experience the incredible joy that is a distinguishing mark of the Christian life.

In the Book of Jeremiah 29:11, God speaks, *“I know the plans I have for you, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”* It is the Spirit of God that carries out God’s plan in our lives. In our Wesleyan tradition, there are three concepts that describe the guidance of the Holy Spirit: prevenient grace, justifying grace, and sanctifying grace.

At a conference on comparative faiths, leaders debated the meaning of faith, especially as it related to Christianity. The Incarnation? Many religious faiths speak of gods appearing in human form. The Resurrection? Some other Gods talk of returning from death. C.S. Lewis wanders into the session and asks, *“What’s the rumpus about?”*

When he hears the subject is ‘the uniqueness of Christ,’ Lewis responds with: *“oh, that’s easy, it is grace.”* The concept of God’s unconditional love stands in the face of our normal human instinct. Buddhism has the 8-fold Path; Hinduism has the doctrine of Karma; Judaism has the covenant, and the Muslims have the Code of

Laws. These are ways humanity attempts to work its way to God, to earn favor. Only Jesus dares to make God's love unconditional.

Prevenient grace is with us before we know that God exists. Before everything, before we enter a church, or hear about Jesus and God's love, God takes the initiative. It is through the power of the Spirit of God that we are given the ability to perceive God. It always begins with God: He initiates a relationship of a covenant. We find ourselves sensing that there is something greater than ourselves. We may start to understand that we are insufficient in ourselves. We discover that there are wrongful actions in the world and that we can do something about it.

A Television reporter asked a paramedic about his most demanding 911 call. The paramedic said, *"Recently, we received a call on Sunday from a large church. A church usher was hysterically concerned about an elderly man who was unconscious and appeared dead. The usher could not find a pulse, and it looked as if the man had stopped breathing."*

The reporter asked, *"What was demanding about this particular call?"* The paramedic said, *"we carried out four guys until we found one that was dead."*

Secondly, justifying grace happens when we choose a life that puts God first, and loving others through the direction of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit carries out God's plan as we are justified by God when we choose a life where we serve God first, and love for others.

Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader, comes to Jesus under the cover of darkness and says "You are amazing. Because of the things you do, you must be of God and from God." Jesus' response is thought-jolting: *"You will not see the kingdom of God without being born from above, without being born anew, or without being born again."* Old Nic is confused. Well, duh! How do you re-enter your mother's womb once you have been de-wombed? Jesus answers with another provocative statement: *"Nicodemus will not enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit."* Jesus means that while we live in this physical

reality there is also a spiritual reality, God's reality.

The work of the Holy Spirit is to take our reality and God's reality and make them one. This is the reason we pray "*Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*"

Lastly, The Holy Spirit completes God's plan in our lives by Sanctifying grace. Throughout our lives the Spirit of God is at work, leading us. Her power is continually available to guide us toward Christ's likeness. The Spirit will continually push and sometimes yank us toward love, faithfulness, and service to our community and world. This is our call to ministry. Through the Holy Spirit's power, influence, and our responsiveness, we can do this together.

How can we know that the Holy Spirit is leading us? Spirit-controlled people filled with wisdom, do good things. They are activists who put their faith into practice. Good deeds are done, not out of envy or in competition with others, but because they are God seekers, who know themselves, and wish to glorify God. These good things are not only actions on other's behalf but they are also marks of our relationship with God.

Spirit and wisdom-filled believers own increasing degrees of Christlikeness: purity, humility, mercy, peacemaking, gentleness and a willingness to yield oneself, are a few of the personal acts of a "*Follower of the Way.*" Grace, wisdom, and power result in a bumper crop of righteousness. Those who do not yet know God seek worldly passions, and this results in dissension and violence. It is by God's grace that we choose God over the secular world.

We are gifted this life for the rest of our lives. The Spiritual life is the best life we can live. We never retire from this, although our physical abilities may dim with age. And, it is never easy but it is filled with joy. Together, with the Holy Spirit, we can continue to make the Kingdom of God a reality in this world. Alleluia. Amen.