

“RECEIVING GRACE”

John 20:19-22; Acts 1:1-11

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Rev. Janet Robertson Duggins
Westminster Presbyterian Church

Today we pause to remember and appreciate the care and nurture and guidance that we have received from our mothers, and other important women in our lives, a blessing that comes not because of anything we've done to deserve it, but simply because this is the nature of love.

Mothers and grandmothers and others will receive fancy cards and cards scribbled by little hands, roses or dandelion bouquets, gifts and hugs... every gift honored as a gift of love.

It's a great day to celebrate with Mark and Becca and Eliza and their family the joy that has come as they have received Maeve into their family, with all the wonder and possibility and changes and challenges a new child brings.

And it's our privilege to receive Maeve into the family of faith, with our determination to surround her with love and encouragement and promises to teach her a gospel of grace.

Maeve will receive the sacrament of baptism. She doesn't know yet what it means (it will be our job to teach her) but that only serves to remind us that the grace of God is there for her, as for all of us, before we can understand it.

Then we receive the bread and the cup that signify Jesus giving of himself to us.

Before we leave, we will receive the blessing that sends us out into the world with good news and compassion to share.

And today is one day in this glorious springtime, when we receive every day new glimpses of the unfolding beauty of the reawakening earth.

Today – every day – we receive the gift of breath,
the gift of “enough,”
the gift of possibility and purpose.

Not one bit of it comes from us, from our worthiness or our effort or our accomplishments.
It's gift; it's grace, all grace.

One of my very favorite verses of scripture is in the first chapter of John's gospel, which talks about Jesus being born as a baby into the world, our world, to live among us and share our humanity and bring God's goodness and glory near to us. As a result, the writer of the gospel says, “from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” (John 1:16)

Grace upon grace.

We talk in the church a lot about Jesus' call to us – to follow him, to love God and one another, to care for our neighbors, to live with integrity and compassion, to do justice, to give our gifts. But first, we have to receive.

When Jesus shows up among the still-fearful disciples on the evening of Easter, he says "Peace be with you." He breathes on them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit. He doesn't berate them for their lack of faith, or urge them to conquer their fears, or lay out a plan of action. First, they receive.

Even as he prepares to withdraw his physical presence from them, and leave them with a mission and purpose, he says, in Acts 1, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you." Being witnesses, carrying on Jesus' work, loving each other, becoming the church... that all happens not thanks to anything good or brilliant we do, but to the work of God's Spirit within and among us. First, we have to receive.

And then, we soon discover, we have to continue to receive God's grace, because ... well, because this is what makes us who we are as God's children.

In a world that tell us to "seize the day" - with all the suggestion of taking, conquering, forcing things to conform to our own will and purposes that expression implies - we come
to the Word,
to the font,
to the table

and discover ourselves as receivers, the recipients of grace upon grace.

This is the most profound truth we can discover about ourselves. It's the rock-bottom foundation of our faith. It's the reason love wins. It's the only hope we have.

Today we gather with Maeve around the baptismal font and celebrate again the ever-flowing gifts of grace that are ours as Jesus' people: forgiveness and peace, power and purpose, belonging in the beloved community, and the Spirit of God working in us.

We come with hearts and hands open to receive. Sometimes this feels at odds with the way of being we've been taught to aspire to - strong, prepared, self-sufficient, in control. But learning to receive the grace of God is one of the most important lessons of the journey of faith. It's what we come to church for. It's the reason we come to the Word, the font, and the table. It's a lesson we never get done learning.

Annie Dillard writes that catching grace is something like holding a cup under a waterfall. There is always more coming. Grace upon grace.

Amen.

Resources:

Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*