

What Does Grace Look Like? 2024
1 John 1:1-2:2

1 John 1:1-2:2 (New Revised Standard Version)

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

The letters of 1st, 2nd & 3rd John were fairly late additions to the NT.

As the early church spread, especially out into the pagan world,
John was one of the last living witnesses who was still alive,
and who had actually walked with Jesus during his ministry.

He wanted to make sure that those who were teaching and leading
got all the stories and lessons, all the events and facts correct.

John begins his letter by making it very clear and plain
that his perspective is drawn from his own experiences with Jesus,
and writing about what he personally knew by observation, vs. 1-2.

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—

And even though the word 'grace' doesn't appear in the text,
the rest of this 1st John passage is really about God's grace.

Curious, I Googled, "what does grace look like", and it came back
with pictures of Grace Kelly, Grace Slick and Grace Jones,
which was not really all that helpful.

But then I realized that I already know what grace looks like.

I see grace being enacted all through the ministries of this church;
people freely giving of themselves, their faithful committed best,
their time, their financial support and talents in abundance,
making visitors and newcomers feel welcome and connected,

and the many missions & ministries of our church family.

It's sheer joy to see grace at work on Wednesdays at Salt and Light,
- the volunteers demonstrating grace to our children and youth,
each week providing an environment of unconditional love,
for even when they're difficult, they're still much loved ...
... which I see as a clear reflection of God's response to our sin.

When I visualize what our sin looks like, as I've mentioned before,
back in the mid 1970's, I was running office products company,
when women were increasingly entering the business world.
In line with the changing times and the growing women's market,
I purchased floor to ceiling display racks full of briefcases
that some guy designed specifically for business women.

I say designed by some guy, and obviously not by a woman,
because they were regular men's briefcases, in bright pink...
... covered with an awful "Barbie doll pink" Naugahyde...
...which of course didn't sell, no matter how low I marked them down.

I had made a stupid decision, a ridiculous and embarrassing mistake.
And so for months, every time I would walk into one of the stores,
I'd see that wall of awful pink briefcases laughing at me,
that looked like a splashing waterfall of Pepto-Bismol.

I experienced my own personal echo of David's words, Psalm 51:3
For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me...
... until I finally admitted my mistake... ... until I repented of my sin
and sent those ridiculous briefcases back to the manufacturer.

I always think of those awful pink briefcases whenever I read, vs. 8-9
If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our
sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and **cleanse us** from all unrighteousness.

God's loving grace and compassion cleanses us, restores us,
and gets rid of the horrible pink briefcases of our lives
by scrubbing away the filth and corruption of this world.
That is our hope -- God's wonderful promise & assurance,
that is the reason Jesus came, and the point of Easter.

God's unconditional and unrelenting grace received through faith,
means to trust God's gift of righteousness **through Christ alone**,
which is the grace that God has accomplished through Jesus Christ.

As John explains in his letter, vs. 3

We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have **fellowship** with us; and
truly our **fellowship** is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

The word, 'fellowship', is a very specific Greek word, *κοινωνία*
which literally means, **a particular close relationship**,

that's brought about through sharing something significant.

As Christians, we share our mutual relationship with God,
the relationship of grace that Jesus has made possible.

We are not all the same, but are individually loved & blessed by God,
each uniquely special, called and equipped for useful ministry,
which we accomplish together as faith-community, the Church.

Although we are different and diverse in many wonderful & unique ways
**yet the faith we share in Jesus Christ and God's gracious love,
inseparably binds us together through Christ who makes us one
both now & forever, which is the hope & truth that we all share.**

**By grace and faith we have all been grafted into the body of Christ,
where we develop and live out our faith** as we serve & participate
actively & usefully in the life & mission of the Church
as an expression of our shared faith and commitments,
for we are created to live the satisfaction of purposeful lives.

**That is the shared and meaningful life together that our Lord
intends & desires for his beloved, precious & blessed people.**

The Church of Jesus Christ is uniquely where we grow in God's grace,
where we're equipped us to serve the Church's mission and purpose,
so that together, we bless and make a difference in this world.

To further explain and clarify this mission of Christ's Church,
the author uses a favorite metaphor or illustration,
which is the contrast between light and darkness, vs. 5-7

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we **walk in the light** as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

John's point is that Jesus is the shining light revealing God's love,
and this, '**walk in the light**', is not something we can do on our own.
It's not something we can bring about by strength of will,
but it is the gift and blessing of God's loving grace.
walk in the light is our faithful response to God's grace and invitation.

Our call is to be the Church of Jesus Christ, a faithful community
of authentic and faithful Christian living and loving,
that reflects God's grace and welcome out into the world.

**That is our task, if we are going to be faithful and authentic,
to walk in the light** and let that light shine out into the world.

During the deadly and desperate influenza epidemic of 1918,
all public gatherings, including church services,
were all canceled to limit the spread of disease.
It was a very discouraging time when people most needed
the encouragement and hope of God's truth and presence.

So a church got hold of some flood lights and set them up inside,
which were pointed shining out through their stained glass windows,
of Jesus the great physician, healing the sick,
of Jesus the good shepherd, carrying a lamb,
and of Jesus Christ blessing the children.

That church was faithful and authentic, and creative,
in reflecting God's love and hope out to a world in need.

Our call and mission is to be like those stained glass windows,
by allowing God's love and grace to shine out through our lives,
so that our faith is made visible to those we encounter,
**to reflect & proclaim the gospel of Christ's love & mercy
to all of our community and out to the world around us.**

**The authenticity of God's presence and gracious love in our lives,
is reflected by our own love and compassion toward other people.**
We're to respond to the love that we ourselves have received
by loving those others, whom God sends **for us to show grace.**

God's grace means that we are truly loved, blessed and precious,
not because we are good or worthy, or in any way deserving,
but simply because God decided to love and show mercy,
as so powerfully demonstrated by the Upper Room meal,
by the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Communion.

Practically & theologically Jesus gave the Lord's Supper to serve
as a perpetual and visible representation of the Gospel and grace.

Communion intends to demonstrate the new covenant in Christ's blood,
that binds all Christians to one another, the body through Christ,
showing that no one is more loved or more worthy than any other.

When Christians gather together in the name of Christ at Communion,
we are coming together to share, this sign and symbol of our unity,
to form and proclaim our shared relationship with Christ,
and that together we are one, the body of Christ, all of us.

Jesus shared that meal as a sign of hope & unity among his disciples,
and that in sharing these symbols, by his body and blood,
they were themselves, to become one body -- the body of Christ,
in which all are equally loved and cherished by the Lord God,
which is a most critical understanding of what God's up to in Christ.

As we gather for the mystery and sacrament of Communion,
we are getting a glimpse of our future joy, home and hope,
a tiny taste of what God's Kingdom fulfilled will be like.

Today let us reflect on that as we come together **as God's beloved
gathered at the Table for a family of God banquet feast of grace...**
... for God's grace has made us all one... the one body of Christ,

a special place where the Lord has chosen to dwell,
for that is a true picture of what grace looks like.

So, as we read in Micah 7:18-19

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression? He does not retain his anger forever, **because he delights in showing clemency**. He will again have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.