



# BEACON

to encourage...to inspire...to inform...

I just discovered something this week, that you might be surprised to find out: Jesus never used the word “grace” in his recorded teachings in the New Testament. While He never mentions the term “grace” (charis in the Greek) the essence and the concept of grace characterizes much, if not most of his prayers, actions, and teachings. One place it shows up with regularity is in the parables. Here are four examples of parables that teach us about God’s grace:

**The Eleventh Hour** - You know the story. A landowner goes out and hires some men to work in his vineyard. The men worked with the expectation of getting paid a day’s wage. The landowner went out every couple of hours and hired more men telling them he would pay them “whatever is right.” At the end of the day the landowner pays the last men to arrive. He hands them each a day’s wage. The men who got there first start thinking, “if those latecomers got a day’s wage he is certain to pay us more.” But they were wrong. When the time came for the owner to pay the first men to arrive they also received a day’s wage...it was what they had been promised. They were not too happy and started raising a stink about how unfair he was being to them. The landowner can do whatever he sees fit and treat people with grace and mercy. God’s economy runs counter to our own...God’s economy is one of grace and generosity. That is hard to digest in a world that is run on capitalism. I know I am glad I don’t receive what I deserve. God is good and the parable of the workers in the vineyard highlights God’s generosity and reminds us that we should be willing to recognize that none of us really deserved to be on the job except that He was the one who did the picking/

hiring. God has the right to show as much or as little grace as he wishes to whomever he wishes, and it is in his nature to show grace (unearned blessing) in abundance, and it is grace upon graced that we were picked to receive it..

**The Two Debtors, or the Unmerciful Servant** - In Matthew 18:21 Peter asks Jesus how many times he has to forgive his brother, seven times? It seems that Peter is asking Jesus what the limits of grace really are: “Just how far does God expect his people to extend grace to others?” So Jesus tells them a story about a man who owed a king an umpteen zillion dollars. What is hilarious about the story is the man asks for patience, saying he will pay him back in full. The point is, paying it all back within the next 5000 years was an absurd thought. The king not only has patience with the man, he forgives the debt in full. He didn’t deserve it. He didn’t earn it. He should have walked away with so much joy over the grace God had extended him that the only possible response would be to be more forgiving and graceful to others.

Sadly, he hadn’t learned anything. He didn’t “get” grace. Immediately he sees a man who owes him something...a few hundred bucks at most. He seizes the man, chokes him and demands repayment! The whole point of grace was lost on this man even though he had been forgiven so much. Jesus’ point is, if we understand just how much God has forgiven us, the things others owe us will pale in comparison and our generosity and graciousness should overflow toward those indebted to us.

Now comes the scary part. Most of us would not physically choke another human being in order to squeeze a few bucks out of them. But when we withhold forgiveness for a wrong done that is exactly

what we are doing. There is no way to justify that. Instead, God wants us to pass on the forgiveness the King has extended to us, and for us to share this grace with as many people as possible. When we do, we show that we understand what grace is all about. When we don't, we show that God's grace really isn't in our lives.

**The Parable of the Wedding Banquet** - Grace means we get what we don't deserve, grace's companion is mercy – not getting what we do deserve. Matthew 18 is about mercy, Matthew 22 is about grace. In Matthew 22, as he is entering Jerusalem, Jesus tells a parable about a king who threw a wedding banquet for his son. All the people you might expect to be there turned him down. So he sent out servants to bring in whoever would come. So the servants went out and invited everyone and filled the banquet hall with anyone they could find. Jesus tells this story just after he has entered Jerusalem. If you were to make a list of those one would expect to figure out who the Messiah was, when he would come and what he would do it was the religious leaders of the day. But they rejected Jesus' invitation. So, gracefully, Jesus extends the invitation to those one would not expect to be at the messianic banquet – both good and bad. Why? Because the King's Son's wedding is glorious and worth celebration, and the celebration needs to be big, so the King fills the banquet hall with those whom he wishes to attend, those who you wouldn't expect and certainly those who don't deserve to be there. They were not the well healed and influential. They were not the blue bloods and powerful, they were simply the ones who responded when they received the invitation.

If the point of this parable is that not everyone who "deserves" to be there will be...in fact none of us deserve to be with God and yet He invites us anyway, and he makes us "worthy" not by our doings but His son's blood, sacrifice, resurrection, and perfection. We become royalty and have the righteousness of Christ on (the white wedding clothes). This is grace. God is throwing a party and we are brought in at the expense of the Son, and we go from vagrant nobodies with a horrible record to royal children with a record of pure, loving perfection.

**The Prodigal Son** - Luke 15 is one of the most famous chapters in the New Testament. In this chapter, Jesus tells three stories about things that are lost. Really it is about one thing,

God's grace and joy seen in His love for the lost. So Jesus tells these three stories and each one ends with the appropriate celebration for things that were lost being found. God and all of heaven celebrate grace. The point of these three stories, in one parable, is not just that there is celebration, the point is who is celebrating. Those who find things celebrate. Those who refuse to celebrate, while everyone else around them does, have real issues – like they don't like and/or understand grace.

The backdrop for the stories is Jesus welcoming sinners and eating with them while the Pharisees complain about it. Sound familiar? God is celebrating the return of these sinners. Jesus celebrates it. Everyone is celebrating except these older brothers who would rather complain because they have been "slaving away all these years".

The key point of this parable, in context, is Jesus revealing for all who would hear, especially the religious leaders of his day, what God is really like. He tells of a God who is full of grace and mercy and forgiveness and love, who celebrates pig-slop covered prodigal sons' return and reconciliation. Frustration on our part towards idiots who do the idiotic, disrespectful, irresponsible things that the younger son does, puts us in the place of the older brother, the unmerciful servant, the complaining workers, the Pharisees, and those who refused the gracious invitation of the King. What's our attitude toward those who mess up? Do we judge, Do we complain? Do we make comparisons? Do we with log-filled eyes pick at splinters? Do we demand payment? Do we withhold forgiveness? Do we get frustrated? Do we elevate ourselves above those who fail? Do we understand grace? Do we have angry scornful looks for those who show up late or distract us in church when we should with all the angels in heaven celebrate with them that we are together in God's house, by His grace? Do we put scarlet letters on those who have been given robes, rings and sandals? Do we understand grace? Jesus did, and he taught it clearly, although un-named, in his teachings, from the sermon on the mount, to the parables, to his high priestly prayer, to his discussion with Nicomedes, in which he said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that whoever would believe in him would not perish but would have life everlasting" He teaches grace, and the grace clearly eluded to in John 3 points to the main point I want to make: Jesus is grace.

John's introduction to his Gospel describes Jesus as being the embodiment of grace and truth. (And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son<sup>1</sup> from the Father, full of grace and truth <sup>16</sup> For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.) Paul reminds the Corinthians (and us) " For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich." And describes this embodiment, this act, this living example of grace to the Philippians when he said: " Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." And to the Romans Paul declares grace in Christ when he said: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.." It's the same as Jesus describing to Nicodemus His Mesianic purpose (John 3:16) – to be given for us - in our place, that we might be saved by him. Jesus is grace.

Discovering the Grace of Christ with you,  
Pastor Todd

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## Youth Stuff



**March 3-5, 2017**

High school ski/snowboarding trip and retreat at Mont Lawn Retreat center in the Poconos! It is going to be a great weekend so don't miss it!

**COSTS:** Retreat only—\$194 ▪ Retreat & Tubing—\$236 ▪ Retreat & Lift Ticket—\$230 ▪ Retreat & Lift Ski/Board Rental—\$255 ▪ Retreat & Ski/Board rental & lesson—\$258.

Costs include all transportation, accommodations, all meals once we arrive, one day on the slopes.

Call Laura in the church office for more information or to sign up.



**SCHOLARSHIP**

**OPPORTUNITY**

Choices are offering two scholarships again this year: \$500 for 1 HS senior girl and \$500 for one HS senior boy. **Deadline to apply is March 1st.** Scholarship forms can be found out on the bulletin board, or check in with the church office. They will also be available at HS youth group.

**"Watch your life and doctrine closely"**

"What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us." ~ *II Timothy 1:13-14*

Have you ever had a well-meaning believer say to you: "Christianity is about a relationship with Jesus – don't get lost in the weeds of theology and doctrine?" And, yet, don't we wonder: How in the world do we even know who this Jesus is apart from theology and doctrine?

A minister once told me that "Christianity isn't a set of ideas, but a way of life." And, yet, isn't Christianity both a set of ideas (doctrine) and a way of life, among other things?

The Apostle Paul tells young Timothy: "Watch your *life and doctrine* closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers [I Timothy 4:16]."

Biblically, it is clear that *both* our lives *and* our doctrine matter greatly to God. Matters of doctrine and theology – following our culture's downgrading and dismissal of even the notion of truth in general – are often treated, even in the church, with contempt and disapproval.

In the words of the title of theologian David Wells' 1993 book, there is still "no place for truth."

So, the question remains: Why does doctrine matter?

***Good theology is deeply practical***

Spiritual immaturity, the Holy Spirit's power for life and ministry, and spiritual fruit are often lacking in communities, families, and individual lives when doctrinal truth is downplayed or degraded.

Old Adam – our sinful human nature – fights against the true God and His ways. Our sinful hearts are deceitful and – when detached from the corrective of the Holy Spirit's ministry through sound doctrine – we are driven by our fallen natures to believe unworthy things about God, Jesus, and ourselves.

This is a key reason why the Apostle Paul wrote his letters to the New Testament churches – they desperately needed bad theology corrected according to the Word of God. Read 1 Corinthians – the Corinthians desperately needed their unworthy ideas about God, worship, how to live, and so on, corrected that Christ would be glorified among them and that their love would be made complete.

In fact, it is difficult to imagine reading any book of scripture and concluding that doctrine doesn't matter. The very structure of many of the Apostle Paul's letters begins with doctrinal truth, then transitions to practical application based upon the doctrine presented.

Despite its present unpopularity, sound doctrine is essential to spiritual healthy communities, families, and individual believers! This is why I have been encouraged recently by our Christian education ministry at Safe Harbor!

In one week, I heard of a women's group planning their next study through a DVD-based curriculum called, "The Truth Project." This is a study that seeks to ground believers in the truth of our faith, so that we can think biblically about all of life!

Often times, we lack a fully-formed biblical framework by which to interpret our lives and the world around us. Whether we're thinking through our jobs, politics, art, economics, and so on, it is absolutely essential to develop a biblical worldview by which to think "Christianly!"

If you are a woman sensing God nudging you to grow in this way, please contact me at the church office and I will let you know the dates and time of this upcoming study.

I am encouraged by the turnout and response to our Winter Quarter adult seminar, "A Beautiful Design," which is another DVD-based study led by Rick & Beth Mellinger on the hugely relevant topic of God's design for gender roles. Our culture is as confused as ever – and frankly, so is the church – on God's design for men and women. What does it mean to affirm the biblical truth that men and women are created equally, but uniquely? Check this class out on Sunday in the sanctuary if you are longing for answers amidst the confusion within and without the church. Come find out what it means to be a godly man and godly woman!

I am encouraged by the interest in the new "Survey of the Westminster Confession of Faith" class, which has outgrown our classroom (a good problem to have!), as we're discovering a passion for truth that is contagious and an excitement about getting "grounded" in one's faith (as one class member put it).

Please join us in the gym alcove (the recessed area by the gym kitchen) this Sunday as we explore the great biblical truths of the Westminster Confession together. It is my prayer that the Lord would ground us more in the great truths of our faith culminating in thankful worship for who He is and He has done in Christ!

God is at work laying a foundation of faith in ALL of our Christian education offerings – these three examples merely come from feedback I've heard in one recent week! If you're not currently plugged in to our Christian education ministry at Safe Harbor, I would encourage you to take a look at our current offerings and check a class out!

<http://safeharborpca.org/docs/2017-SafeHarbor-WinterClasses.pdf>

We offer childcare and nursery during this time, as well as biblically sound classes for your children and youth taught by our volunteer team of committed men and women who are passionate about Jesus and the Gospel and sharing God's Story with your kids!

So, after worshipping together, grab a cup of coffee, enjoy some fellowship, then head to a class that grabs your interest and check it out! Truth matters. How is God calling you to go deeper this year? It's not too late to jump in wherever the Lord leads!

Pastor Tony



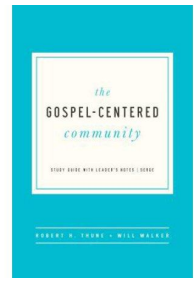
## Winter Happenings at LCA!

**LCA Scholastic Book Fair will be here: February 13th-15th.** There will be an opportunity to purchase books during school hours only. Fundraiser.

**LCA Science Fair—Friday, February 24th at 7pm.** This is a great time to see the children’s scientific talents showcased in a variety of ways. Free.

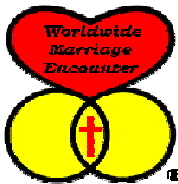
**SAVE THE DATE:** Annual Auction will be held on Saturday, April 1st here at Safe Harbor Church!

Our book for the 2017 Lent season is, “The Gospel-Centered Community” by Robert Thune & Will Walker.



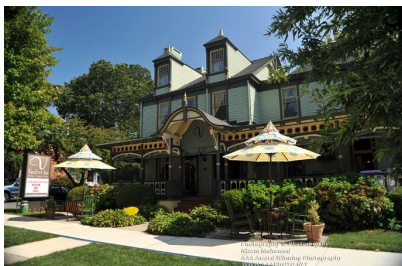
We don’t want to be alone; we want to be loved and we know that genuine relationships make our lives rich. But somehow living in community always ends up being harder that we thought. This book helps us learn how the spirit shapes diverse people into a Christ-centered community that reflects Jesus to a watching world. This book is full of wisdom and is a biblically solid guide on how to do more than merely exist in community.

Books will be available in the next week or so after service.



### Married Couples – REDISCOVER THE ONE YOU LOVE on a Worldwide Marriage Encounter weekend!

Come away from the world at the beautiful Vandiver Inn **February 24-26, 2017** and enrich your relationship. You will deepen your intimacy, improve your communication and make your marriage better. A Marriage Encounter weekend will help you discover the happiness God wants you to experience in your marriage. If you’re even thinking this might be for the two of you, then COME! God is talking to you. Whether you’ve been married a short or long time, your relationship will benefit from a Marriage Encounter weekend. Contact Greg & Shirley Hills at [solchvary@hotmail.com](mailto:solchvary@hotmail.com) (302-453-9538) for more information or to register for this weekend.



Both weekends are hosted by the Presbyterian Expression of M.E

### Upcoming Blood Drive



Safe Harbor will be hosting the first blood drive of 2017 on **Friday, February 10th, from 10:30am-4pm**. If you have given in the past, or would like to be a first-time donator, please call Karen in the church office, or go directly to the website and follow the prompts: [www.redcrossblood.org](http://www.redcrossblood.org).

Also looking for one volunteer to help with the registration table from 1pm-4pm. If you can do this, contact the office—it is just checking people in and giving them the literature to read.

**Bonus: all presenting donors will receive a \$5 gift code to use at Amazon! Don’t miss out!!**

## Mission Update from Little Hands of Hope

Hi Everyone,

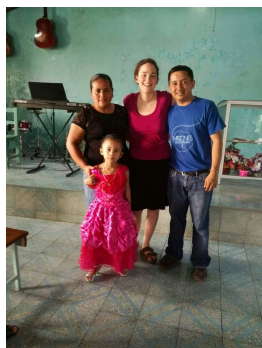
We hope you had a merry Christmas and a wonderful start to the new year. Thanks to your loving generosity, we ended 2016 serving 56 children from 43 families and also enjoyed a fun and lively Christmas celebration!

Our party included a three-legged race, a game of Pin the Star on the Christmas Tree, Christmas carols in English from the children, and 4 extra cooks who made about 400 pupusas and helped us serve close to 130 people. We were also able to spend above our \$40 goal for each gift basket and enjoyed picking out extra goodies



for the kids and their families!

As always, so much is happening here for us. Compassion International is almost ready to start just down the road and this will allow us to open our doors to a lot of children who have been waiting for a long time. Since Compassion only serves families with limited resources, we will also be able to bring in some children who are in a financially stable situation, but whose little souls still need to hear about Jesus. It looks like we will still be literally tripping over each other and we are very busy with paperwork to help us legalize Little Hands in El Salvador in order to be able to buy and build a bigger space. We do have a property with a bigger house that we are looking at right now. Please pray for wisdom, efficiency, and smoothness in what can be a very complicated and involved process.



One of our biggest struggles right now is finding good help. We need teachers who have a desire to work with children, love the Lord, and can follow instructions. Our staff in 2016 did not adequately meet these qualifications and we plan to hire new staff this year. This search is really a challenge for us! Please pray for guidance and efficiency in the hiring process.

Finally, please pray for safety and for peace in El Salvador. During the last couple of years, El Salvador has ranked among the most violent countries in the world. Last week, 10 gang members escaped from a prison only a half hour away from us in Meanguera. Law enforcement officers are targeted by the gangs and people are regularly found murdered in the streets. We hear of family members of the children we work with becoming involved in gang activity and the turmoil breaks our hearts and the hearts of Salvadorans watching their country be torn apart.

Words cannot express how much we need and treasure your prayers and support. You are such a key part of this ministry; we couldn't do this if the Lord didn't provide through you all!

Love, Becca

***A percentage of your purchase made at Amazon can now go to Little Hands of Hope! Go to Amazon Smile and choose Little Hands of Hope, Inc. as your charity.***

***Thank you for helping to change lives in El Salvador!***

**Help  
Wanted**

Office volunteers

Do you have a few hours to spare on Friday afternoon? The office volunteer ministry would love some more help with folding and stuffing bulletins each week. If this is something you can help with, once a month, please contact Dottie Gilman at: 410-827-5698. THANK YOU!

**Weekend Inquirers Class planned for February:**

Friday, 2/17 (7-9pm)

Saturday, 2/18 (9am-12pm)

If you have been visiting the church, or are a regular attender and interested in membership, call the church office to get on the list. You can also take this class if you would like to learn more about the Presbyterian faith.

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New Women's Wednesday study starting.....

Dottie Gilman and Gerri LaRose will be leading a new study on Wednesday mornings, entitled: "The Truth Project". This DVD-based small group study is comprised of 13 one-hour lessons. This study is the starting point for looking at life from a biblical perspective. Each lesson discusses in great detail the relevance and importance of living the Christian worldview in daily life.



The first class starts on February 22nd at 9:30am—workbook is available (\$10.49), but not required. **If you plan to attend the class and would like a book, please contact Dottie or Gerri, or the church office, so they can be ordered.**

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**February Foods:  
Tuna & Soups**

This past year was a fruitful one for the outreach ministry. PRAISE GOD! We furnished 10 houses, as well as providing washing machines, dryers to other individuals in need.

**BOUNTIFUL BLESSINGS** is growing and donations are always welcomed. All non-food items are welcomed but they are in particular need of multi-purpose cleaners and dish soap.

**THE FOOD PANTRY** is huge each month. It is held on the third Friday of every month at 5:30pm. Bags of good are also given out between pantry months, for those in need that come by the church. Main items to stock up on are tuna fish and soups.

**THE HOMELESS SHELTER** got off to a slow start in January, but is now up to 11 guests as of this week. Along with individuals, there are a few families at the shelter with a total of 5 children. Sandy gets calls daily to see if there is space availability!

Please keep these individuals and families, that need shelter and food, in your prayers. Also pray for the folks in the shelter right now, that they may find a place to live.

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New Wyld Life youth group will start at Sudlersville Middle school, on March 10th after school. Can you help with supplies that you might have lying around your garage?

- Folding table ▪ White sheet ▪ Pedometers ▪ Floor-type scooters ▪
- Hula hoops ▪ Bike helmets ▪ Volleyball set ▪ Sports equipment (basketballs, volleyballs, footballs).

All donations can be dropped off at the church office.

**Thank you for partnering in this youth mission!**

