

## **Sunday 18 2010C**

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

August 1, 2010

*Occasional*

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

Why are you here this morning? That's the question I ask myself at least a hundred times each week. Why are YOU here? You could play golf. You could watch television. You could go shopping. There are so many opportunities in life. Why would you bother attending worship?

I can imagine some of your answers. You come here on Sunday mornings because your friends are here. Some of you. Maybe your blood relatives are back in Iowa or Pennsylvania. Or back in Jalisco or Michoacán. Or back in Latvia, or Louisiana, or London. This is the place where you've reconnected. This is the place, where, as the Apostle Paul's wrote in our Bible, you and I feel like we are GRAFTED onto a living vine. Some of you come here for connection. Christ becomes real for you in community and connectedness. That's your story.

Some of you are here because of the Ten Commandments. You may not like church, you may not feel particularly happy about being here. But you're here because God said you ought to be here. God commanded it. It's like eating spinach or exercising. You don't do it because you like it. You don't do it because it feels good. You do it because it's good for you in the long run. Christ challenges you to set aside your selfishness. And you come to worship. Because for you, Christ is alive and real *in the challenge*. You accept that God is speaking to you from outside of your self. That's your story.

Some of you seek learning. After all, the Bible isn't just a book. It's a small library of books. And Christianity isn't just a little thing. It's the world's largest religion. It's been around for two thousand years. There is a lot to explore. There is a lot to question. You come here to explore, and to question, and to think. That's your story.

A few of you probably come for encouragement. It takes a lot to get through the week. A lot of hope, a lot of strength, a lot of courage. Some of you have bad health, stressful occupations, difficult family problems. You seek inspiration. That's your story.

Why are you here this morning? You may be here for a very different reason than the person sitting next to you. Yet, we are all here for Christ. For some of us, Christ in our neighbor and in community. For some of us, Christ the teacher and rabbi. For some of us, Christ the comforter and consoler. For some of us, Christ the truth-teller who awakens us from our complacency. This is the richness of our worship life. The Grace of God in Christ Jesus is here. In various ways. [Our congregation's mission statement says that our task is to enthusiastically claim and share that Grace.](#)

There is an “and” in that [mission statement](#). There are two verbs. Claim. And share. Claiming Grace means that we identify it and make it ours. I just gave you an example of claiming Grace by pointing out some of the different ways that Grace comes to people here in our worship. And once we’ve identified how Grace is here, we can do a much better job of sharing it.

Just think about the richness of Grace that is here on Sunday morning. There’s so much Grace here that it bumps into itself. We have two groups of people here at Dove. I’m not talking about Republicans and Democrats. I’m not talking about Vikings fans and Packers fans. I’m talking about people who believe that the sanctuary should be quiet before worship. And people who believe that the sanctuary should be noisy before worship. The quiet people encounter Christ in prayer. In thinking. In organ music. The noisy people encounter Christ in their brothers and sisters.

Now this is a humorous conflict. Which is why I chose it. The noisy people have essentially won the battle for now. The Worship and Music Committee is controlled by the quiet people, and they have essentially lost the battle, but are unlikely to give up the war. It really is a conflict between two ways of experiencing Christ. I’m claiming the Grace. I’m identifying two different ways that people experience Grace in our Sunday worship. It so happens that those two forms of Grace are bumping into one another.

I’m not criticizing, here. I’m affirming. The Worship & Music Committee wants quiet before worship. And the only way they can get it is if I, the pastor, repeatedly reprimand the congregation for talking and visiting and carrying on during the prelude. And I won’t do it. Because I tend to think that the Grace that some of our members find in their friends and in this congregation family ought to be affirmed, and not reprimanded. And then the Worship Committee says to me, Yes, but they can experience that Grace on the patio. To which I reply *“It’s 100 degrees on the patio. How can you experience Grace when you’re in hell?”*

I’m not criticizing. Really, I’m affirming. Now, if you’re in the noisy group– and you don’t have to be all that noisy to qualify– in the words of Louis Armstrong’s song, “What a Wonderful World,”

*“I see friends shaking hands, saying how do you do? They’re really saying ‘I love you.’”*

They’re REALLY saying. Satchmo knows that Grace lies right under the surface of things. That’s why we have to claim it. We have to name it so that we can see it.

Now, if Grace is embedded in our shaking hands and saying “how do you do?” Then what is it like if you are a person who wants to belong? You visit Dove of Peace because you want to experience Grace in fellowship and in community. And so you visit here, and you come into the sanctuary, and there’s a buzz of voices and chatter as friends greet one another. Because the Worship Committee lost the battle. And you think to yourself, “this seems like a friendly place.” And then you find a seat. And nobody speaks to you. Friends are shaking hands and saying how do you do, but nobody wants to be *your* friend. How does *that* feel, especially if that’s the primary way that you experience Christ, in community and in relationship?

And what if you like the joyful atmosphere of church, and you wave and shout across the sanctuary to someone you are glad to see? What if you make a joyful noise, but then when the pastor says,

“The Lord be with you.” Nnnn-nnnnnn-nnnn-nnn. “The Gospel of the Lord!” Nnnn-nnnnnn-nnnn-nnn. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. Nnnn-nnnnnn-nnnn-nnn. If you can be loud for your friends, then you can be loud in your thanks and praise.

Remember, our mission statement has two verbs. Claim. *And* share. And so if you are a quiet person, how do you help others discover Grace and serenity by sitting still? How do you *share* that Grace, without seeming to reprimand them? And if you are a person who finds Grace in fellowship, how do you share that fellowship with the stranger in our midst? If you find Grace in the festive nature of our coming together, what does it convey if you act timidly in the principal acts of worship?

I mentioned last week that our bishop Stephen Talmage put our own Eric Holtan in a leadership position for worship in our synod. Eric went to a conference in Houston, Texas. And he came back and he said to me, “*You know what the expert said in Houston? He said that in worship, God acts. I never heard of that before. I thought worship was something people did for God. I never thought of worship as being the time when God does something for us.*”

Now, Eric is a cradle Lutheran. Baptized in clear Minnesota water, confirmed, always a practicing Lutheran. The purist Lutheran who still gets upset that the American Lutheran Church merged with the godless infidels of the Lutheran Church in America. Now, if *he* was able to get this far in life being wrong about worship, I wonder about other Lutherans. The definition of Christianity, the definition of a pastor’s work, and the definition of Christian worship is that God’s Grace comes to us in Word and Sacrament. Martin Luther went through the medieval worship service, and stripped out all of the sentences that said *we* were doing something for God. Word and Sacrament are where God acts upon us. Always.

Now, during his confirmation classes, Eric was probably more interested in girls and football than he was in his Small Catechism. But I hope that we all understand that the Church in general, and worship in particular, is where God is acting. Acting upon us. Because you can’t really say to someone, “You are worshiping in the wrong way.” You can’t truly say that, even though I have probably said it myself on occasion. I can’t say, “Your type of church music is wrong.” What I can say is that God has spoken to me in this kind of church music. Or, God has transformed me in that kind of a worship setting. Or, my old pastor preached powerfully *to me*. Our mission is to claim Grace– to figure out how it has been working– and to share it.

I’m not specifying any particular action or behavior that we need to change. Worship changes like trees change. All living things are different year by year. I’m not saying that we need to do this one thing or that one thing to be right. I’m asking for a change in attitude. Like Eric. I think we need to make sure we understand what is going on. Even though it may be beneath the surface of things, God’s Grace is working and active. And our mission is to receive it well, and share it well. Two verbs. And worship, which is the center of Christian life and of the Church’s existence– worship is the most important place of all for claiming God’s active Grace and sharing it. Amen.