

By Grace Through Faith

By Linda Rex

March 10, 2024, 4th Sunday in Preparation for Easter or Lent—During this season as we prepare to celebrate the events of Holy Week, it seems at times as though I am experiencing afflictions and temptations similar to those Jesus experienced during his forty-day wilderness experience. Even though we know that Jesus arose triumphant from all that afflicted and crucified him, we often face events, circumstances, and sorrows in this life which challenge us, grieve us, and tempt us.

It is good to take some time to reflect on the spiritual realities which are true in Jesus Christ, as well as our deep need for all he has done, is doing, and will do in us and for us by the Holy Spirit. What a blessing that we have hope in him!

This is what the apostle Paul points out in our New Testament reading for this Sunday, Ephesians 2:1–10. There is incredibly good news in this passage, for Paul reminds his readers that every one of them, whether a Jew like himself or a non-Jew, had at one time, like each and every one of us, been dead in trespasses and sins, having fallen short of the mark of those who were meant to reflect the image of God we see in Jesus Christ. As a result, every human being was facing the consequence of God’s immeasurable love poured out in redemptive correction and restoration. Then he uses those two beautiful words which change everything: “But God...”

Here the apostle Paul reminds us of the nature and character of God. God is rich in mercy. God has great love towards humankind. God is gracious. And because this is who he is, he reaches down into the death in which we found ourselves to bring us up in his Son Jesus Christ, seating us with and in him in the heavenly places where our Lord now sits in face-to-face union and communion with his Father in the Spirit. Because of who God is, we have been saved by faith, are being saved, and will experience our full salvation when Jesus returns in glory.

We are reminded too that our efforts to do the right thing, our actions of service or helping, do not save us. We are only saved by grace through faith. And we discover in Jesus Christ that we as human beings have a way of being we were created to live into—the way of other-centered, self-sacrificial, giving love, the same kind of love that is essential to God’s being as Father, Son, and Spirit, three Persons in one Being. As his beloved, adopted children, we were meant to be loved by God, to love him in response, and to love one another. There is a way of being which is ours, which we were created to live out, which Jesus recreated in his incarnational, cruciform self-offering, resurrection and ascension. Our new life is in Christ, and reflects his own way of being, as he lives in us and through us by his Holy Spirit.

As God’s beautiful masterpieces, we daily bear witness to the transformational healing work of Jesus Christ as we live out the kingdom life given to us in him. This can be challenging in a world that is given over to the ways of God’s adversary and to the lusts and desires of our human flesh. And it can be difficult, for we are each easily tempted, distracted, and overwhelmed by what we face day by day as we go through life. What struggles are you facing right now? Is there something pulling you down? Are you finding yourself caught up in unbearable circumstances? Do you see everything that is wrong with the world, yourself, and/or others and wonder how anything will ever be any different?

Here it is important to humbly go before the throne of grace to find help in time of need (Heb. 4:16). We need to be reminded of who God is—the God who loves us so much that he gave us his Son. In the Gospel reading for this Sunday, John 3:14–21, we are reminded that God’s Son did not come into this world to condemn the world, but to save the world. God’s intention, his motivation, his driving force is love and grace. So, to go before Jesus in our humble need is the

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best possible thing we can do, for there is where God meets us to draw us to himself, to give us by his Spirit his healing, renewal and restoration. What is keeping you away? Why not stop right now and open yourself up to your heavenly Father's love and grace, and simply trust in Christ. Let God be who God is—your Savior, your Redeemer, your Lord—the One who loves you, forgives and accepts you, and welcomes you back home.

Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us and for being so gracious toward us. No matter how hard we try, we cannot get it right. No, indeed, it seems that all we can offer you is our brokenness, sinfulness and falling short. Grant us anew your grace, and form Christ in us that we may effectively bear witness to your glory, love, and grace through Jesus by your Spirit. Amen.

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” Ephesians 2:1–10 NASB