

Working Together With Christ

By Linda Rex

June 23, 2024, Proper 7 / After Pentecost—When we talk about the topic of grace and the forgiveness we have in Jesus Christ, a lot of times we focus on what this does for each of us in our own individual life and circumstance. We often neglect to talk about the implications of this—in what does our acceptance of God's grace result?

In our New Testament passage for this Sunday, 2 Corinthians 6:1–13, the apostle Paul reminds the members in Corinth that God's grace is a wonderful thing. We don't want to underestimate God's grace or make it less than it is. What God has done for us in Christ, in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension, and in the gift of the Spirit, is wonderful, powerful, and effective. God has opened the way for each of us to share in his life and love. In Christ and by the Spirit, each of us is welcomed home, and has a place at the Lord's table. But Paul warns us that we are not to receive this grace in vain. There's a response to this grace Paul calls us to—a self-offering which reflects the self-offering of Jesus Christ. Because of what Jesus has done and is doing, we want to actively respond with our own service to God and others.

Paul draws attention to the reality that we are each called to be co-workers with Christ. This was our original calling in the garden of Eden, and God has redeemed us in Christ for this very purpose. Our lives are a participation in Christ's life. Our fellowship with God and others is a participation in Christ's own fellowship with our Father and one another. Because we are in Christ and Christ is in us, we are caught up in the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ in this world. There is a message of good news, of God's grace for us in Jesus Christ, which is available for all, which the Lord wants us to share with everyone.

This labor of love, of sharing the good news with others, is our participation with Christ, and it means we will face some challenges. The apostle Paul speaks of the many difficulties he faced: *“much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger.”* Although we may not experience challenges as difficult as these, we have our own struggles that we go through as we seek to live out the truth of God's amazing grace at work in our lives. When we share the good news of Jesus Christ with others, these challenges may become even more complicated and difficult.

The blessing which goes along with these struggles is that the grace of God in Christ means we have available the gift of the indwelling Spirit of God. This means that our participation in Christ's ministry and mission in this world are not something we do on our own or under our own strength. Indeed, Paul reminds us that we are given divine spiritual weapons (*“weapons of righteousness”*) for us to use for both offense and defense (*“the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left”*). By the Spirit, we have genuine love for others, and have the word of truth upon our lips. Paul says that we are filled with patience and kindness by the power of God, so that we are able to present the gospel and live our lives in a way in which God's ministry will not be discredited or cause unnecessary offense.

The apostle Paul then mentions certain paradoxes. When we look closely at these, we begin to see how our participation in Christ and his mission and ministry is reflected in our own life of faith. Paul writes that he and his co-workers show themselves commendable servants (NKJV: ministers) by *“by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers and yet true; as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.”* As we look closely at this list of paradoxes, we see much that resonates with the life of Christ. The Son of God left the riches and glories of heaven to join us in our poverty, that he might make us rich. The Son of God came to die that we might live forever, and

he became a man of sorrows, that we might together rejoice, now and forever, in his heavenly kingdom. The One who gave up everything, so that we might one day share all things with him, is the One who is in us, with us, and for us—Jesus Christ. As we participate in Jesus' mission and ministry in this world, we can be comforted that we go through nothing alone—he is ever with us and in us. In Christ, we have great hope, and we want to share that hope with others, no matter the cost. Our ability to bear that cost, whatever it may be, is given to us by our heavenly Father, through his Son Jesus, in the Spirit. This is why we want to be open-hearted toward others, because God has been so open-hearted toward us in Jesus Christ.

Heavenly Trinity, thank you for the love you have shown to us by making a place for us in your divine fellowship, that we may share in your life and love. Thank you for the grace which is ours in Jesus. Grant that we may faithfully share this good news with others as you have shared it so generously with us, in Jesus' name. Amen.

“And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain—for He says, ‘at the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you.’ Behold, now is ‘the acceptable time,’ behold, now is ‘the day of salvation’—giving no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited, but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers and yet true; as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things. Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide. You are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections. Now in a like exchange—I speak as to children—open wide to us also.” 2 Corinthians 6:1–13 NASB