# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Grace and Peace”**

**Titus 1:4**

 **May 15, 2022**

The Apostle Paul wrote three Pastoral Letters to two of his spiritual sons, Timothy and Titus. Having spent time with Paul on his missionary journeys, he sent them to lead churches: Timothy in Ephesus and Titus on the island of Crete. The last couple of months we have explored Paul’s letters to Timothy and today we take a look at his letter to Titus. I invite you to turn with me the first chapter of Titus from which we will read verse four

I am writing to Titus, my true son in the faith that we share. May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior give you grace and peace.

Grace and peace. Paul uses this phrase 18 times in his letters, and they appear in one form or another at least once in each of his 13 writings that we have in the New Testament. Clearly, these words carry great significance for Paul, as they should for us, for they portray the core of the good news. It is by grace that we have been saved, and the result is that we now live at peace with God. But, the good news is about more than what happened in the past. Yes, we have been saved by grace, but it is also by grace that we are being made more like Christ, and it is by grace that we will be taken home to heaven. Similarly, because of grace we have been living in peace with God, but because of grace we can also live each day at peace with others and with ourselves, and it is by grace that we will live in an eternal state of peace. This is what grace has brought about, is bringing about and will bring about, but what is grace?

Grace is collectively the free gifts of God offered to all who believe and receive. I have here a pen, and if I tell you that I want to give it to you as a free gift, there are two things you must do to possess it. First, you must believe that I am speaking truth, that you can trust what I say. Second, you must receive it. So it is with the grace of God. Do you believe that God is speaking truth when he offers you salvation for your sins, when he promises to be with you, when he tells you that he loves you? And, if you believe it to be true and that God is willing to do all these things for you absolutely free, that there is nothing you must do first for him to make the offer, will you receive his gift? Will you make it yours and allow it to shape your life?

When we accept the grace of forgiveness for our sin and by faith believe and receive that forgiveness, then that grace saves us from the consequence of sin which is eternal separation from God. But, grace doesn’t end there. Grace is necessary not only for our salvation, but grace is also necessary for the daily living out of that salvation. Or, as our mission statement puts it, to become more like Christ. Having believed and received the pen, as it were, we now need to start using it. So it is with the grace of God. It’s not there just to save you from sin, but also to equip you to live each day as a faithful follower of Christ. For example, how do you love like Christ loved? Christ said, “Love one another as I have loved you.” If you have believed and received the gracious love of God, then you can share it with others. How can you experience true joy in your life? Jesus said, “My joy will be in you.” God rejoices over you, as a shepherd rejoices when he finds his lost sheep, and that gift of joy enables you to live joyfully. What about peace in the midst of the turmoil of the world in which we live? Again, Jesus, who said, “My peace I give you.” Peace is yet another gift of grace, freely given, but like all the gifts of grace it must be believed and it must be received. Do I truly believe that God can give me peace, and will I prayerfully receive that peace by placing my anxious thoughts before him? Love, joy and peace are all gifts of grace, as are patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, gifts that are ours through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Christian life is not for us to live in our own abilities and determination. It is for us to live by daily putting into practice the gifts of grace that come from God – it is taking the pen and using it for the purpose for which it was designed. And, while my pen will run out of ink, the grace of God will never run out. As Paul says in his letter to the Ephesian believers, “God is able to do abundantly more than you can even think or imagine.” If there is a gift of grace that you need to do what God has asked of you, it is there for you in abundance and it will come to you in ways that you can’t even imagine. What you and I need to do is believe that God will do what he has promised and receive what he offers.

Last Sunday we talked about reaching the finish line of our life. What is going to get you to that finish line still trusting God, still faithfully following Jesus Christ, still relying on the Holy Spirit living in you? Grace will. Grace has brought you safe this far, and grace will lead you home.