

Lent Midweek 3—March 3, 2021  
Text: Ephesians 2:1-10  
Theme: O Sacred Head Now Wounded v.3

**We say it all the time as Lutherans, “by grace you have saved through faith.” But I wonder sometimes if we really think through what we are saying. When I teach the confirmation class, I can always spot the kids who have been raised coming to church and Sunday school every week, or the kids who go to Lutheran schools because they know all the code words. I ask a question, and before it is out of my mouth, I hear the answers coming back: grace, faith, Law, Gospel, sin, forgiveness, Word, Sacraments! Those are important words, but we would benefit from thinking about what they really mean.**

**St. Paul is speaking to the Ephesians in our text tonight. The Ephesians were having some issues between the members of the congregation that had come from Judaism and those who had come from being a gentile. That would be like people in this congregation who come from five generations of old guard Missouri Synod looking down upon those who have a more eclectic religious history. Of course, that would never happen here, but it did in Ephesus. The point is that Paul had to sort out things that were personal preference from things that were theological. He had to discern what was a matter of tradition and what was a matter doctrine.**

**Those are difficult lines that we continue drawing today. Sometimes there are things that seem absolutely to be common sense that cannot be done because they violate doctrine, no matter how easy they might make our lives. Sometimes there are things that one might hold to as though it were the very word of God handed down at Sinai, when in fact, they are just the way someone along the way chose to do something and we have continued on in like manner.**

**When sorting out these kinds of questions, Paul starts with the fundamentals: grace and faith. Grace is the fact that the second person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ, died in our place on the cross to pay for all human kind's sin. Our hymn verse tonight says "What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered was all for sinners' gain." All human beings have sinned and fallen short of the grace of God so Jesus died for all human beings. "Mine, mine was the transgression, but Thine the deadly pain."**

**"Lo, here I fall, my Savior! 'Tis I deserve Thy place; Look on me with Thy favor, And grant to me Thy grace." How do we apprehend the grace of God? That is an important question because that's the only difference between someone who is saved and someone who isn't. Whether you go to Heaven or Hell all depends on the answer to that question. Grace is a reality but how do I apprehend it? One**

**person is able to grab the grace and the other is unable. Grace is offered to every single person on this earth. There is no one for whom Jesus did not die. That is why Paul was clear that it does not matter if you are from Jewish ancestry or Gentile. It does not matter if you were born and bred Missouri Synod or newly arrived here from some distant religious shore. We are all saved the exact same way, by grace.**

**“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Before you ever think of boasting of your grace, hear our hymn that we sing tonight and look upon the cross. Before you ever think of glorifying yourself for being Lutheran or even Christian, look upon the cross. Lest we ever forget, “Mine, mine was the transgression, but Thine the deadly pain.”**

**And faith, what of faith? Faith too is a gift from God. Faith was given to you along with grace. It makes no sense to offer a gift that the receiver is unable to receive, so God gives faith to grasp grace. It is the hand that apprehends grace, but unlike grace, faith can die. Grace is an historic fact that cannot be changed or undone. Jesus Christ died on the cross, suffered Hell and rose again on the third day. Faith, on the other hand, is a living thing that needs nourishment. With proper nourishment and exercise it grows**

**powerful. When starved and left idle, it atrophies. "For by grace you have been saved through faith." Without faith, grace is useless to you.**

**Christ has looked upon you with his favor and granted to you grace. Your faith holds onto this precious gift. Feed that faith every chance you get. Pick up your Bible and read something from God's Word every day to feed that faith. Even if you only read one verse, it is better to feed your faith something than nothing. If you don't have time to make Chicken Parmesan for dinner, you don't let yourself go hungry, you grab a sandwich or a power bar or something. The same holds true for feeding you faith. Also, make worship an absolute priority every week to feed that faith. I know that there are a hundred things that interfere with worshipping God. That is exactly what Satan intends. Make worshipping God number one and everything else takes a back seat. And, finally, know that while Christ's suffering was horrendous, it was not in vain. No, what my Lord has suffered was all for sinner's gain. Hold on to it for dear life.**