

February 14, 2021

An Opportunity to Receive Grace

Woman touches Jesus' cloak



Special Music: "Grace Got You"

Mercy Me

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTiUjNT_vAM

Luke 8:43-48

As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him.

**43 And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years,
but no one could heal her.**

44 She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.

45 “Who touched me?” Jesus asked.

When they all denied it, Peter said, “Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you.”

46 But Jesus said, “Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me.”

47 Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed.

48 Then he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”

The story is told of the sale of Manhattan Island to the Dutch by the Canarsee Indians has been retold and embellished to the point that it is difficult to track down the exact purchase. According to many current versions of the story, Peter Minuit, the new director of the Dutch West India Company in 1626, was authorized by the Dutch West India Company to settle any local disputes in and around New Amsterdam (which today is called New York City) and trade for land rights in the area. As the story is told, Minuit bought the land rights for Manhattan Island from the Canarsees for \$24 worth of beads, trinkets, a jar of Mayonnaise, two pair of wooden clogs, a loaf of bread and a carton of oats. That purchase was never recorded.

There is a communication from 1626 that states that Minuit had purchased the Island of Manhattan from the Indians for 60 Guilders. An historian in 1846 stumbled upon that communication and wrote that 60 guilders was the equivalent of \$24 and somehow that figure stuck. But modern historians have recalculated that figure stating that 60 guilders was actually equivalent to about \$951 at the time. Still a steal for the Dutch, right?

Or was it? It seems that the Canarsees Indians of the Lenape tribe were primarily located around the area that is now South Brooklyn. It was another tribe that actually occupied the majority of Manhattan Island. So, when Minuit came across some Indians traveling through the area (the Canarsees) he assumed that they

were the occupiers of the land. The Canarsees did not mind taking advantage of the situation and selling land that they did not occupy. They were on their way back to the Brooklyn area and would probably never see Minituit again. So, they did not mind making the trade because they actually had nothing to lose.

Everybody wins, right? Except the tribe that was living there.

Or did anyone win? It took years to untangle the mess. And in the end, it was discovered, from a cultural standpoint, that all of the Indians were laughing at Minituit and the Dutch because the Dutch had this absurd notion that land could be bought and sold. In their eyes, how could anyone be foolish enough to buy something that actually belongs to God. Yes, the Native Americans did set up territories among themselves but that was more about defining living space than it was about owning land. This ridiculous notion of purchasing land that the White Man seemed to thrive on, had them in stitches.

I'm not sure we have learned our lesson even today. Adults and children alike go online and play virtual games where they grow virtual farms, fight virtual armies and pay good old American dollars to buy virtual goods and upgrades. This is a multibillion-dollar industry centered around paying real money for virtual assets. No, I don't think we have learned our lesson. We are just as gullible today as Minituit seemed to be to the Indians.

Western Civilization has a long history of convincing people that they need to buy non-tangible assets. During the middle ages, the church sold indulgences to the people for sins they had not yet committed. Governments have taxed non-tangible assets at every level for centuries. Today, we trade and sell virtual assets like bit coins, software and game add-ons. I know a man who was paying bills recently and left his credit card out on his desk in his home office. Three day later he noticed an unrecognized charge on his credit card statement for \$800. It seems that his pre-teen son had used his card to buy add-ons for a game that he was playing online. Ouch!

None of that is to say that putting a price on non-tangible assets is wrong, but it does have a tendency to make us look at all non-tangible assets from a different angle than God intended. How do you put a price on Love, Hope, Mercy, Forgiveness, and Grace? After all, if you can buy a virtual corn field, purchase virtual magical armor, or trade in bit coins, why can't you buy a little Grace now and then?

The truth is a lot like fooled into believing that we need to buy indulgences, just in case we might commit some sin. Doesn't buying those indulgences in some way convince us that it's alright to commit that sin because we bought indulgence insurance?

For those who believe that we do not buy sin insurance these days, I truly want you to think again. We often justify our actions by trying to balance some kind of cosmic scale by thinking that we can buy ourselves a bit more grace by giving a little extra on Sunday morning. “I did this particular thing last week, so I will put a little more in the plate this week.” “I know that I am going to that party next week and will probably do things I shouldn’t, so I will increase my offering to kind of offset that.” Where does such a notion come from? Well, a lot of that comes from the church dealing with confessions and penance. We don’t have the confessional in protestant churches, so we allow guilt to drive our need to make things right by defining penance for ourselves. We barter with God like we would barter with a vendor in a market. Which is really silly when we think about it, because God has nothing to sell.

I’ll give you \$10 for that forgiveness!

Sorry. Forgiveness is free.

I’ll will attend church 30 times this year for that salvation!

Sorry. Salvation is free.

I’ll write a big check to the homeless shelter for that blessing!

Sorry. Blessings are free.

I'll make a weekly donation to the food pantry for some mercy!

Sorry. mercy is free.

I'll sing in the choir and serve as a deacon for a place at your table.

Sorry. Your place at the table is free.

I will teach Sunday School and serve on the church board for a little grace.

Sorry. Grace, like the air you breathe, is free.

God is not in the bartering business. We seem to insist on paying for things that He gives us for free. We simply cannot believe that they are free. We cannot seem to wrap our heads around it. We want to pay our way into heaven and it is just not possible. God's Grace is free for the taking. He gives us to us. He wraps us up in it to keep us warm. He encourages us to breathe it in. He begs us to see it for what it is. Abundant and free. When Jesus suffered and died for our sins, He was paying it forward with no obligation. All we need to do is breathe it in, to accept the gift. For us to want to give God something in return is akin to slapping Him in the face by trying to make it a business transaction when it was never meant to be anything more than a gift of infinite value.

In our scripture passage from Luke today, a woman has had a serious health issue for 12 years and has not been able to find a single person who could help her. A woman with bleeding issues was considered unclean among the Jews and

she was probably leading the life of an outcast. She had most likely seen every doctor within traveling distance and found absolutely no relief. When she found out Jesus was coming through town, it must have seemed to her like a divine opportunity to be healed. How discouraged she must have felt when she saw the throngs of followers and disciples surrounding Him. Most of us would have given up hope trying to reach and speak to Him. After all, He didn't know her and was extremely busy dealing with the crowd. So, rather than stop Him from his business, she thought she would sneak a little healing. Jesus was known for his compassion and for His ability to heal the sick. She came up behind Him and touch the hem of his garment. Who would know? People were pushing and pulling Him from every direction. Who would care? And when she touched that material, her bleeding stopped at that very moment. And so did Jesus.

I want for each of you to realize that although the spiritual intangibles that God offers us are free, it does not mean that He does not know when they are accessed. It is a lot like innocently Googling something on the internet and you think you have been discreet and suddenly you are bombarded with ads regarding whatever it was you were Googling. God is not going to bombard you with adds, but He knows when you access the gifts that He offers. He is quite aware of it. It is there for the taking, but He is going to know that you touched that garment, just like Jesus was aware of the woman touching His garment. He knew that His free gift of healing had been accessed because He felt the release of that power into the woman.

He wasn't angry, but just as with so many seemingly innocent moments surrounding the life of Christ, this moment was a divine opportunity for teaching. The grace with which Jesus reaches out to the woman to let her know that everything was okay and that He was aware of what she had done and why she had done it. She had reached out with faith and with humility and she needed to know that He understood.

48 Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

I don't know about you, but there are times when I wake up on a cold morning with my blanket wrapped around me and I just don't want to get up. I am soooo... comfortable. I am soooo... perfectly warm. I am grateful for the moment. I relish the experience. And it does not cost me anything. I don't have to pay anyone for that experience. That is the way grace works. It is finding ourselves wrapped in the arms of God, pulled close to his bosom and feeling so blessed, knowing how very much he loves and care for each of us. It is a safe, warm, enveloping, peaceful experience that we can carry around with us wherever we go.

John 1:16 tells us:

Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given.

But we have to reach out in faith knowing that the opportunity to embrace and be covered by grace is a completely free gift from God, no strings attached. We have to reach out to touch the hem of His garment to receive grace. He is going to

know that the grace enveloped us. He will not be angry. He fully expects us to do it. Just like He makes room for each of us at His table. He knows when we sit in that chair at His table and seek the divine opportunity to communion with Him. That is the nature of our relationship with our God. He anticipates our desire to draw strength, hope, mercy, forgiveness, and grace from Him, so we should not be surprised when He acknowledges it. Jesus says in Luke 12:32:

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

It is a joy for Him to share His glory with us. We are His children, and he dotes on us. He wants the very best for us.

Every moment of each day, each week, each month, each year is an opportunity to gather that grace around us and allow it to bring us into a place of harmony with the Creator and Master of our souls. God likes it when we do that. It shows Him that we crave His attention and feel secure in His presence. There is such peace in the understanding that Jesus paid it all and we can rest in the presence of our God fully aware of the grace that He is swaddling us with. The Opportunity of Grace is always omni-present and is a cherished benefit of being a part of the family God, called to His purpose.

AMEN

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