

THE GIVER WHO RECEIVES
I Kings 17:8-16; Gal. 1:11-24; Lu. 7:11-17

10th Sunday (C)
June 10, 2007 Adelphi

I recently got a bumper sticker that says, “Grace happens!” Grace matters! Without grace, without grace from our creator, without God’s grace, we cannot live an abundant life! Grace is the theme of my life in the last few years. It is not that grace was not in my life before. It is that I have learned a new way of seeing and recognizing the gift of grace given me.

I see these little graces in my life that I might not have seen before. Then I realize God’s grace is so abundant that I just need to pay attention to it. More and more of my friends are blogging. Maybe someday I will blog also! One of my friends put this quote on her blog: “The winds of grace are blowing all the time. You have only to set your sail.” (Krishnamurti)

In my journal, I record moments of grace that I encounter each day and each week! I am so grateful that God graces me with kind people, with a smile from a stranger, with a small gesture of love from friends, with beautiful rays of sun, with breeze,

Grace happens at the highest point of our life. Grace happens at the lowest point of our life, too!

The widow of Zarephath only has a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug. She is about to gather some sticks, go home, prepare the meal for herself and her son. Eat it and wait to die! Life is so desperate! She sees the end of life coming. She is ready to accept the end of life, the end of all hope.

But God sends the prophet Elijah to her. Elijah says to her, “Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son.”

Even at such desperate situation, the widow gives the food to Elijah first before she feeds herself and her son. What a profound trust in the words of the prophet! Her jar of meal and jug of oil do not empty but continue to provide food to the entire household.

The widow of Zarephath is a giver who receives. She can give because she has experienced the grace of God. She can give because she has such trust in the grace of God.

Let us forward the time to many centuries later. We encounter this well-educated, wealthy, and powerful man called Paul. As well documented in the book of Acts, Paul loves and knows the Jewish traditions. In order to protect the Jewish traditions, Paul begins to persecute Christians violently.

But one day when he is traveling on the road to Damascus, God appears to Paul and Paul is converted.

In the letter to the churches in Galatia, Paul says it so beautifully, “God had set him apart before he was born and called him through God’s grace. God was pleased to reveal his Son to Paul, so that he might proclaim Jesus among the Gentiles.” Paul recognizes that his call to serve God comes from God’s grace.

God’s grace comes to Paul when he is at the highest point of his career. God has a different plan for his life!

An old saying has it, “The Gospel comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.” In a broader sense, we can be both the afflicted and the comfortable at the same time. God’s grace comforts us when we are afflicted. God’s grace afflicts us, knocks us out of our comfort zone for our good and for the good of God’s Kingdom.

Grace that comforts us during our lowest point, or grace that knocks us out of our comfort zone during our highest point, both graces are important to our faith journey. We have to learn to receive graces in different situations.

Everything comes from God’s grace. Only when we receive God’s grace can we genuinely give, can we freely give.

Recently, when we served communion by intinction, I broke the bread and gave the bread to you. Presbyterians, and most Christians are usually used to a tiny piece of bread during communion. Some of you were astonished by a big chunk of bread that I broke and gave you. Some of you even tried to break in into smaller pieces and tried to give it back to me.

We are so used to a tiny symbol that we sometimes forget the abundance of God’s grace. If God has given you a lot of graces, would you say, “God, too much. Take your grace back!”

I am usually touched by some of you who would hold together your palms to receive the bread. Yes, during communion, let us remember we are the ones who receive God’s abundant grace! Don’t be afraid of receiving and eating a big chunk of God’s grace. Just be thankful!

We have also been praying a Prayer of thanksgiving instead of a prayer of dedication after offering. This is part of a liturgical renewal movement in the Presbyterian Church in the last decade or so.

Our gifts to God are not the focus during worship. God’s gifts to us are. We give because God has given us! So, instead of emphasizing dedication of our gifts to God, we emphasize and give thanks to God for God’s gifts to us.

Only when we remember all that we have are God’s gifts to us, only when we are thankful for God’s gifts to us, can we give freely and serve freely our brothers and sisters in the world!

Our meals, our possessions are gifts from God. Our call to serve God is a gift from God also. Everything is a gift from God.

I was deeply moved by the engagement and attention that the new officers gave during the officer's training. I shared with them several major points in our Book of Order.

From Chapter 6 "The Church and its Officers" the first sentence states, "All ministry in the Church is a gift from Jesus Christ." I will remember until the day I die that my seminary professor added, "All ministry in the Church is a gift from Jesus Christ. It is not a right!"

We serve because we are given the gift to serve, we are given the grace to serve. It is not about power struggle. It is not about my right or your right!

During the officers' training, we also examined the ordination and installation questions that the new officers will answer during the service on June 24.

One of the questions asks "Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?" One elder said so eloquently. "This is not about us. It is about God. It is not only about what we do in the church. It is also about what we do and who we are in the world."

Yes, it is really not about us! It is about God. It is about God's grace working in our lives and in the world!

We give and we serve only because we are receivers of God's grace!! Grace happens! Grace matters! Amen!!