

March 11th – Friday

Centering Breath Prayer: Help me receive...your wondrous gifts.

Opening Prayer:

Beloved of God, hear my prayer. May I be receptive to your word and filled with your love as we walk together during this day. Bring me understanding of the gifts which you bestow to those who have received you as the answer to life eternal. Open my eyes to the joy that following you brings even in the midst of my brokenness and uncertainties of life. In your beloved name, I pray. Amen.

Scripture: Romans 5:12-19

Key Verses: Romans 5:16b-17: (16) “For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. (17) If, because of the one man’s trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ” (NRSV).

Yesterday was full of questions and challenged us to think beyond our old, traditional thought patterns. Hopefully, if you are reading this, you did not get too discouraged and give up on the process. Questions can make us uncomfortable, but they can also push us to new horizons. Even if you still cling to your traditional beliefs, there is benefit from the attempt to see with new eyes. So, now we come to the answer to yesterday. Whether you see original sin in the same light or a different one, the answer to it comes to us through Jesus. Paul is very eloquent in his presentation of Jesus Christ as the answer to sin and transgression, whatever form the concept of sin takes for you. Sin, in whatever form you conceive, engenders death and a broken relationship with God. Belief in Jesus, the Christ brings healing of that relationship and justification through his life, death and resurrection. Death and suffering, pain and brokenness in our earthly lives are still present and very real. However, we can move beyond them because Jesus has given us gifts that are eternal and endure beyond death as well as bringing us blessings in the midst of our brokenness.

While Jesus walked on the earth in a human body, he taught with an authority which constantly amazed people, including his disciples who followed him daily and had many more opportunities to observe and question and dialogue with him. Jesus constantly sought out those whose lives were broken and on the fringes of society. He healed in every way imaginable and some which were not imaginable to us as humans. He challenged the traditional teachings of his day on the law and the spiritual kingdom of heaven which he heralded as imminent. He helped us to differentiate between the letter of the law and the spirit of the law. How sad that 2000 years later, we still want to condemn others for breaking what we consider the letter of the law, the rules we have imposed on others to be necessary for “salvation.” Why do we still want people to “earn” the privilege of “salvation” when Jesus offers it freely as an amazing gift?

Paul presents a stark contrast to the condemnation of sin brought into the world by the actions of one man, presumably Adam. Yet, the actions of all humanity bear out the sinfulness of humanity. Even 2000 years after Jesus hung on a cross and was resurrected, we still sin. The wonder of Christ's free gift of abundant grace is still waiting to be fully enjoyed, but the forgiveness, the grace of Christ's continued presence with us, even within the sinful presence of humanity is boundless and very real, bringing a healing that cradles us, even though death, suffering and broken relationships still abound. Have we truly accepted the gift of abundant grace? Perhaps the journey of love to the cross and beyond will help us bring our brokenness into that grace more fully as we continue to travel together. Are all our questions answered? I would venture to say that they are just beginning. But, we know that the answer lies in the gifts of Christ, freely given to each of us as we come to him for healing, searching for truth, trust and especially abundant grace. As we climb the first hill on the pathway, cresting the summit, struggling with our own sinfulness, let us remember the abundant grace which was given from the cross.

Additional Scriptures: Ephesians 2:1-10

Questions for reflection and/or journaling:

1. How hard is it for me to accept the free gift of abundant grace?
2. Do I feel I need to do something to earn such grace or do I feel undeserving of it?
3. How do I see Jesus the Christ as the answer to the question of sin?

Suggestions for action:

1. Phrase for your path: **ABUNDANT GRACE.**
2. If you feel unworthy of the gift of abundant grace you might make a list of things which you would like to confess to God. After the list is made, spend some time in prayer asking forgiveness for these things you have identified as your sins. After you complete this confession, say these words: "I have received the free gift of abundant grace because of Jesus Christ and my sins are forgiven."

Closing Prayer:

God of grace, thank you for extending to me the free gift of abundant grace. I do not deserve it, but I also recognize that no one else does either. Your love constantly amazes me and I stand in awe and deep humility as I accept your wondrous gift. Thank you, Lord, for loving me and for traveling with me on this journey of love, reliving your trip to the cross and beyond. In your grace-filled name, I pray. Amen.