

2nd Sunday after Christmas C 05 January 2025

John 1:1-18

St Peter's Lutheran Church, Elizabeth

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HAPPY NEW YEAR!!! And grace upon grace to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth... From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. Let's pray: ...

Pies. That's what jumped into my mind as I was preparing this sermon today. I thought about meat pies. I know, it's a strange connection but stick with me. It's not really as much of a half-baked idea as it sounds.

On Sunday afternoon, a couple of weeks ago, I was feeling peckish as I drove home from here and I thought to myself, "I'd love a meat pie with sauce." So, I dropped in to the bakery off Montague Road, looking forward to a scrumptious meat pie. When I arrived (to my horror), it looked as though the bakery had shut early. Happily, a couple of the ladies who work there reassured me that I could sneak in and grab a pie before they packed up early, owing to the heat of the day. To my surprise and delight, I was offered two pies for the price of one, which I graciously accepted, and further to my surprise, was only charged half the price of one pie.

I protested, suggesting that they needed to make a profit but they were insistent that I accept their generosity. So, I skipped away joyfully with one mince pie and one tomato and onion pie for the princely sum of \$3.00.

Free doesn't compute in a world in which we're expected to pay for what we get. It just doesn't add up in a world in which we're supposed to earn and deserve what we have. Free just doesn't make sense in a world in which we work to pay off our debts, and strive to return the favour. But, this isn't only about money. It's also about the expectations and transactions in the relationships we have with each other. It's also about how we love. And, it's about how we perceive our standing with God, and our assumptions about how God operates.

So, if it's difficult to trust and believe in a free meat pie, how much more difficult is it to open ourselves up and make ourselves vulnerable and receive "grace upon grace"? Maybe that's what today's gospel is getting at when it says, "And his own people did not accept him." Maybe "grace upon grace" sounds too good to be true, and you know what's said about something that sounds too good to be true.

I want to be totally honest with you. I struggle terribly with grace. I struggle because I don't feel worthy to receive anything from anyone. I even get overwhelmed when I receive gifts from my family. I guess I don't know how to be a gracious and thankful receiver. I want to illustrate that struggle with an imaginary conversation between Grace and myself:

Grace: Hi, I'm Grace.

Me: G'day. What brings you here today?

Grace: I want you to have this gift.

Me: Oh, thanks. But you didn't have to get me anything.

Grace: I know I didn't have to get you anything, but I want you to have this gift.

Me: But I don't have anything to give in return.

Grace: I don't want anything from you. I'm giving you a gift.

Me: But why? I don't deserve it.

Grace: So? This isn't about what you do or don't deserve. It's a gift.

Me: But I don't understand. Why are you doing this?

Grace: It's just what I do. I'm Grace - gracing. I'm Gift - gifting.

Me: I'll never be able to repay you.

Grace: I don't want you to repay me. I want you to accept the gift.

Me: That's very generous of you.

Grace: I'm not trying to be generous. I'm trying to give you a gift.

Me: I'll never forget this.

Grace: Please, forget it. Just enjoy the gift.

Me: One day I'll return the favour. I promise.

Grace: You don't owe me anything.

Me: I'll be forever in your debt.

Grace: I don't want you to be in debt to me. Just take the gift.

Me: What's the catch?

Grace: There's no catch. It's free. It's on me.

Me: Surely there's something I can do for you.

Grace: How can I convince you? All I want is for you to have this gift.

Sound familiar? Do you struggle with receiving grace like I do? What might your life be like without struggling to accept free, unmerited grace?

My guess is that without that struggle, we would see, experience, and accept a life of "grace upon grace," gift upon gift, with no questions asked. In other words, everyone would receive free meat pies for life, no strings attached. Isn't that what we've caught a glimpse of and experienced these past few weeks? Think about all the gifts we've received.

These past weeks we've received:

- the gift of friends;
- the gift of family;
- the gift of feasting;
- the gift of celebration;
- the gift of hope;
- the gift of faith;
- the gift of joy;
- the gift of peace;
- the gift of love;
- the gift of forgiveness;
- the gift of our life's manger being filled;
- the gift of a Saviour born to us.

We all received the gift of the Christ Child.

These past weeks we've received gift upon gift; grace upon grace. What if that's the way God wants us to see and live life? What if that's the lens through which we're to read holy scripture and the Child's life? What if holy scripture is a gift catalogue of the Word become flesh?

This Word become flesh is the One who:

- graces our life's water with wine;
- graces our troubled hearts with peace;
- graces our thirst with living water;
- graces our hunger with loaves and fishes;
- graces our paralysed legs with power to stand and walk;
- graces our blindness with eyes to see;
- graces our unbelief with faith;
- graces our doubts with hope;
- graces our fears with love;
- graces our sins with forgiveness;
- graces our prodigal trips to the distant country with a homecoming party;
- graces our brokenness with abundant, new life.

All that and more entered our lives when "the Word became flesh and lived among us... From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace."

Grace upon grace, gift upon gift. Reflect upon what that might look like in your life today. Think about the ways in which you're being gifted, graced. What are your internal conversations saying to Grace?

If you're arguing with Grace, offering protests, trying to measure your worthiness, looking for some way to repay, feeling indebted, or otherwise saying no or making excuses for why you shouldn't accept the gift... then just stop it! Grace cost God everything; the life of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Grace costs us nothing. Grace, Jesus Christ, is the free gift of God's incredible love for us, and there's only one word Grace ever wants to hear from all of us. And that word is... Amen. So let it be.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds safe in Christ Jesus, Grace upon Grace. Shout it with me, Saints – Amen!