

## That's Easy. It's Grace

**Passages: Psalm 103**

**Isaiah 58:1-9**

**Luke 13:10-17**

**Lectionary occasion:  
no specific occasion.**

Dear Reader,  
Thank you for choosing my service  
I ask you please to leave the sermon and readings as  
they are.  
The hymns should be OK but can be changed if  
necessary.  
The prayers will get dated - if you can do your own that  
would be good.  
God bless you.

## That's easy. It's Grace.

Grace, mercy & peace to you from God the Father & our Lord Jesus Christ

**Hymn: 13 Praise my soul**

**Prayer:** "A Gospel Prayer" separate sheet below

**Read 869: Psalm 103**

A reminder just how great & wonderful God is. Will read it together in the usual fashion ...

Hope you got the overwhelming sense that God is a GOOD & gracious God, who is deeply committed to his creation, his people. His love for us is steadfast, reliable, rock solid. Even though we are sinful & are far from being the perfect creation he intended, he still cares for us. He is compassionate & understands our human weakness. He knows that we sin & make a mess of things, but he doesn't hold that against us; he is far more concerned with restoring us & our relationship with him, so he's more than willing to deal with our sin. A verse that was omitted from the hymn book talks of his righteousness & justice - his acting to put right what is wrong, & to bring things back into balance & harmony. His dealings with us are far better than those of the best parents, whose love for their children is not dependent on their behaviour. I - who prepared these words - am so grateful that he does not deal with me according to my sins, nor treat me as I deserve. He is compassionate, merciful & forgiving, he is generous & understanding & gracious. His love & commitment to us are not just in words but in practical action for our total well-being.

Let's spend a moment thinking about our wonderful God, who loves us & is deeply committed to us, in spite of all we do that must upset & anger him.

**Prayer of confession**

Hospitable God, when we have made the Church a closed place,  
Where only those who know the unwritten rules are welcome:

**Forgive us and enlarge our hearts.**

When we have made our minds a closed place,  
where only those who think as we do are welcome.

**Forgive us and enlarge our hearts.**

When we have made our hearts a closed place,  
Where only those who love as we do are welcome:

**Forgive us and enlarge our hearts.**

Thank you for loving us as we are & for calling us to grow into the image of your Son in whose name we pray. **Amen**

**Hymn: 230 There's a wideness in God's mercy**

**Readings:**

**Isaiah 58:1-9**

**Luke 13:10-17**

**Hymn: 42 O love of God, how strong & true**

At a conference in Oxford on comparative religions there was a big discussion as to what makes Christianity unique, different from all other religions. They couldn't come up with an answer - incarnation? No. resurrection? No. then C S Lewis walked into the room & asked what they were talking about. As soon as they told him, he came up with the response, 'That's easy. It's grace.'

Grace - What makes Christianity quite unique among all the world's religions is that God's love is free & unconditional, that his favour does not have to be earned in any way. It's not about obeying laws, it's not about being good to earn a place in heaven - it's about coming home to a loving Father who holds his arms wide to welcome us, as did the father in the story of the prodigal son.

As we read today's Psalm & Gospel, it is the grace & the graciousness shown in them that overwhelms us. That God should love us without any strings attached, whether or not we deserve it. that is the best news you will ever hear in your life. Guaranteed.

The psalmist was able to write so confidently of God's love & forgiveness long before Jesus came to demonstrate that love in a visible, tangible human form.

And in our gospel reading we do see Jesus showing that same compassionate loving care for the disabled woman.

Let's try & picture the scene.

This is what we may see. A building about the size of our smaller chapels. At the front the portable Ark where the scrolls of the Law & the prophets were kept. In front of the ark & facing the congregation are the chief seats for the religious & governing leaders of the synagogue - & the most honourable seats were near the reading desk. In the body of the synagogue is a congregation of men. Behind them & perhaps to the sides, the women - & hidden among them, the woman bent double. At the front of the synagogue stands Jesus, talking to the congregation, but his eyes aren't on the important people; he's looking at the back & around the edge of the room & he sees this woman that most people would ignore. Her need at this moment is more important than his teaching, so he calls her out, & so see him going to meet her halfway. Straight away he puts his hand on her & declares her healed. An act of grace

- compassion & mercy in action. He doesn't just feel sorry for her - he does something to help her.

Surely everyone is pleased? Well no. the synagogue ruler is up in arms because this is the Sabbath day, the day of rest, the day when good Jews do no work!! How dare she come on this day for healing! Any other day fine, but not today. It's interesting that it's not Jesus he's telling off, but the worshippers; probably they were rather in awe of Jesus, having seen what has just happened.

But it's Jesus who turns the tables on the elders as he reminds them in no uncertain terms that they all release their animals on the Sabbath so that they can have the water which they need for comfort & survival. This woman is no animal, she is a daughter of Abraham - one of the chosen people of God. She too has been released - from an 18 year imprisonment in a crippled body, Sabbath or no, he was not going to make her wait a day longer for her freedom.

Grace shown by Jesus. Compassion & mercy in action. Grace sadly lacking in those who prided themselves on their religious observances & keeping of the rules.

It was grace that was lacking in the people Isaiah was addressing. They were keeping the rules; they were fasting & felt that God was not rewarding their piety. 'we're obeying the law, we're even fasting - but you don't notice; you're not keeping your side of the bargain,' they seem to be saying. 'No', says God, 'that's not good enough. You're going through all the motions, you look very religious lying on your sackcloth & ashes. But it's just a day of meaningless ritual in your lives, for as soon as it's over you're at each others throats again. I'm not impressed at all.'

Fasting is far more than just keeping the rules for a day. It needs to be seasoned with grace - with compassion & mercy in action. If you are not going to eat for a day, share your food & your home with those who need them. Don't spend your time in meaningless abjection but in working for justice on behalf of those who truly are abject, who are poor, oppressed or unjustly treated. 'Do that,' says God, '& then you'll have no doubt that I'm listening to you & blessing you.' That was God's message to those who thought they were obeying the laws & were therefore all right in God's eyes. Many people believe it is a message that all of the established church needs to bear in mind, perhaps especially those of us who have been obeying the rules for most of our lives - coming regularly to worship, giving our offerings, reading our Bibles. Never will any of that earn us any brownie points in God's Kingdom.

In his excellent book, 'What's so amazing about Grace?' Philip Yancey tells a disturbing true story of a prostitute, - drug addicted, homeless & sick who went for help to some one who worked with down & outs in Chicago. Dreadfully upset, she told of how she rented out her 2 yr old daughter to men who wanted kinky sex, because that was the only way she could support her own drug habit. The social worker could

hardly bear to listen to her. Then he asked whether she'd ever thought of going to a church. He said, 'I will never forget the look of pure, naïve shock that crossed her face. "Church! Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They'd just make me feel worse."

This is the challenge of today's scriptures. How do people feel when they look at me, at you, at the church? If they feel they're in a bad place, do we make them feel worse? Do they see us as judgmental & more keen to keep the rules & do things 'properly', like the ruler in the synagogue? Or do we help them to know themselves loved unconditionally by a gracious & forgiving God.? Do they find in us grace - compassion & mercy in action?

Do they in see us the image of Jesus - who welcomed society's outcasts unconditionally & helped restore their dignity & self worth? Do they see in us the image of the gracious & compassionate God the Psalmist wanted to praise with all that was within him?

When we find ourselves forgetting just how gracious God is, let's take a fresh look at Psalm 103; that should help us turn back to him in gratitude, worship & praise.

When we find ourselves lacking in grace, too ready to criticise & judge, too bothered about the externals of religion, let's look again to Jesus & learn from him. Jesus who is the ultimate expression of grace - compassion & mercy in action.

And as we experience more & more of his grace in our lives, may we too become gracious like him.

**Hymn: 792: Fill thou my life**

### **Intercessions**

Let us pray for all people everywhere according to their need.

Let us pray for the Church of Christ, throughout: the world

For its unity in Christ

for the fulfilment of its mission

for all ministers of the gospel

for all Christians here in ...

### **Silence**

Strengthen your Church to carry forward the work of Christ; That we who confess your name may be united in your truth, live together in your love & reveal your glory in the world.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Let us pray for all the nations & peoples of the world:

For all who serve the common good

for our own country & government, & for all in authority...  
for those involved in...

**Silence**

Give wisdom to all in authority; direct this nation & all nations in the ways of justice & peace; that all may seek the common good.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Let us pray for those we know & love:

for the local community

for our family & friends

for...

**Silence**

Give grace to us, to our families & friends, & to all our neighbours; that we may serve him in one another, & love as He loves us.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Let us pray for all who suffer:

for the sick

for those who mourn

for those without faith

for those who serve the needy

for...

**Silence**

Comfort & heal all who suffer in body, mind or spirit; give them courage & hope in their troubles; & help them to know the joy of their salvation.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Almighty God, we pray you to unite us all in a common bond of love & service, That we may show forth your goodness & reveal your glory;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amene **Lord's Prayer**

**Hymn: 805: Thy faithfulness, Lord**

**May grace, mercy & peace, from God the Father, Son & Holy Spirit be with you all today & always. Amen**

## Gospel Prayer



### A gospel prayer

Almighty, gracious, glorious God,  
we thank you for your love, mercy and forgiveness.  
We are humbled by your constant, faithful love.  
This year, we pray for a new spiritual season.  
Thank you that your extravagant love means that there is no one  
so broken they can't be healed.  
No one is so lost they can't be found.  
Lord, your love pursues us.  
You came to seek and save the lost.  
And when you find them all heaven rejoices.  
We thank you, Lord, that your love is not found in empty clichés.  
Your love is shown in the giving of your life for us.  
Your life, death and resurrection have opened a way for us to become  
the children of God.  
We know that the good news of Jesus is the power of God  
to change lives.  
We ask that your Church may have a new boldness  
in sharing that news.  
Fill us with your Holy Spirit.  
Give us compassion for the lost.  
Give us confidence in the good news.  
Help us to pray with passion, live with love and speak with boldness.  
Make us a people of faith.  
We pray that lives will be changed and heaven will celebrate as sinful,  
broken people find a forgiving, loving God.  
Lord have mercy.  
Amen.

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