

**Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan**  
**Fourth Sunday in Lent**  
**March 15, 2015**  
**Ephesians 2:4-10**

*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Have you ever gotten a gift which makes you scratch your head because you don't know why you got it? There are many reasons a gift might make you scratch your head. It could be the gift is ugly. It could be the gift is impractical and you have no use for it. It could be because the person doesn't know you and your tastes. There are many reasons that you might get a head scratching gift, but I do know most head scratching gifts come from a sincere heart.

A dad might force a smile when he receives a tie which he will never wear from his kids on Father's Day, but he doesn't doubt their love for him. He knows they are being sincere with their gift. A child might be disappointed with the sweater she gets for Christmas from grandma, but she knows her grandma loves her. A teacher might get an ugly and impractical mug, yet she can hardly be mad at the little boy who gives it to her with such a big smile on his face.

We might scratch our heads about some gifts, but I think we can appreciate the love and sincerity put into them because they come from people who care. Our lesson today is about a gift from someone who cares. However, unlike a head scratching gift, the gift in our lesson is perfect and exactly what we needed. This gift comes from a sincere and generous giver. It is a gift we don't deserve, but it is a gift we cannot live without. What is this gift? It is God's gift of grace.

What makes God's gift of grace so special and fitting for us? It is because this gift of grace comes from God's love and generosity towards us. **"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace..."**

**"...expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God."** The apostle Paul gives us a beautiful picture of God's grace today. He tells us God gives us grace because of his great love for us and the mercy he has on us. Why did God need to show us love and mercy? Paul answers this question in the verses right before our lesson.

**"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath."**

Paul tells us at one time we were dead in our transgressions and sins. This meant we followed the ways of the world rather than ways of God. We wanted to gratify and indulge our sinful nature. We didn't care about others and their needs. We only cared about having our needs satisfied. However, this attitude and lifestyle creates a problem for us. It means we are objects of God's wrath and sooner or later God will carry this wrath out on us unless something changes.

Now, I think we can understand that something needs to change in order for us to avoid God's wrath. Yet, Paul mentions something which might cause a little bit of a problem for us. He said we were dead in

our transgressions and sins. How is this scenario a problem for us? Well, imagine yourself in this situation: You are driving on the highway when you notice something lying across the road a quarter to a half of a mile in front of you.

You continue to drive up and realize it is a dead moose lying across the road. What do you do? You could try and go around, but the shoulder is muddy and you might get stuck. You could try and lift the moose out of the way, but it is too heavy for you to even lift up. You could try to drive over it, but the thought of doing this makes your stomach queasy. There are many things you could try and do to get past the moose like trying to drive around it, move it or drive over it.

Yet, I don't think any of you would walk up to the moose and start begging it to move. I don't think any of you would walk up to the moose and go, "Come on moose. You can do it. You can move. I know you have it in you. What do you say? Could you please just move a little for me moose? Pretty please?" You could do this all you want, but it would never work. The moose is dead. It won't move. You are going to have to find another way to get it off the road.

Has it hit you yet? Who this moose actually represents? The moose represents us because we are dead in our transgressions and sins. Just like it is rather silly to ask the moose to get up and move off the road, it is rather silly to ask us to become spiritually alive. It is impossible for us and shows us we are in serious trouble. What would happen if you ran into the moose at full speed with the car you were driving? It would be a mess. There would be blood and guts everywhere.

We have something much worse than a car bearing down on us while we are lying in the road. We have the full and complete wrath of God bearing down on us. This wrath is bigger and stronger than a fully loaded logging truck barreling down on us. It is stronger than a locomotive steaming toward us and it would not be a pretty sight when it runs into us. It would be worse than blood and guts everywhere because God's wrath would hit us and bring us eternal suffering.

The only thing which can save us from God's wrath is a gift of grace. **"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."**

**"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God."** God's grace is what we call his undeserved love. God's love for us is undeserved because we were dead in our transgressions and sins. We were lying there dead and unable to do anything about it, but God in his love did not want to see his slammed by his wrath. God in his love and mercy reached out to us and provided the life we needed to escape his wrath.

What did he do to save us from his wrath? He gave us the gift of grace in Christ Jesus our Lord. **"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. It is the gift of God."** Jesus stepped in

front of the never ending locomotive of God's wrath and absorbed all of the punishment which we deserved. He endured the agony of being run over by the endless logging truck of God's anger for us.

He absorbed and endured God's wrath so completely that we would never even know we were about to get hit with it. How did he accomplish this task? **"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."**

**"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."** God's gift of grace came into this world to save the world. He did this by giving his life on our behalf. He did this so we would not perish and have eternal life through him. This is God's perfect gift of grace. It is exactly what we needed to escape God's wrath. There is nothing we could do to earn it because we were dead. Yet, God in his love gives it to us free of charge.

**"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast."** God's gift of faith enables us to trust his grace has forgiven all of our sins. We cannot do anything to earn God's love. The Holy Spirit is the one who works faith into our hearts and removes our ability to boast that we are the source of salvation. We aren't the source. We can't make a choice to be saved. The Holy Spirit is the only one who can give this gift.

We all will receive some head scratching gifts in our lives. They might not be our style. They might be ugly. They might have nothing to do with us. However, God's gift of grace isn't a head scratching gift. It is the perfect gift we need. It gives us life and salvation. **"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. It is the gift of God."** Amen.