

**ALDERSGATE UMC OF BUTTE, MT**  
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**May 1, 2022**  
**3rd Sunday of Easter**

The Conversion of Saul – Scripture Lesson: Acts 9:1-6

**9**Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup>and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup>Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup>He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' <sup>5</sup>He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. <sup>6</sup>But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.'

The Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**

**Message**

By the Grace of God

Matthias Krier

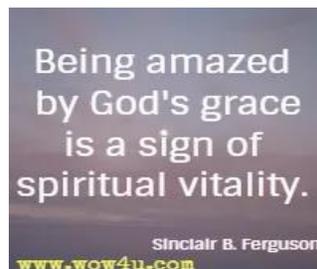
If you haven't been able to tell in the past couple of years or so, Grace is one of my favorite topics. Why? Because the world in which we live in has so much in the way of hunger, violence, war, chaos, abuse, uncertainty and fear ... so this is why grace is so powerful for me:



I have shared with some of you before this grace parable that I say before my feet hit the floor each morning. I do not like to get out of bed until I can feel it. Listen to this parable and take in its meaning and its power:

*The disciple asked the Master, "What has grace brought you?" The Master replied, "When I awaken in the morning, I feel like a man who doesn't know whether or not he will live until evening." "But doesn't everyone know this," the disciple asked. "Yes," said the Master, "but not everyone feels it."*

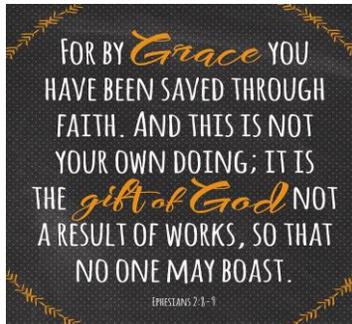
When you feel that this very day could be your last, you live this day differently. Why? Because you can feel it. I can feel it. Besides:



A dear friend of mine said to me when I shared this with him a couple of decades ago, he said, "But I am afraid to die and so this grace parable is terrifying to me." If this is true for you, make your peace with one day dying and from personal experience, I will tell you how liberating it is not to be afraid of dying. We are resurrection people, so let's act like it!

Grace is not only a sign of spiritual vitality, grace can empower us to be a resurrection people and have the strength, and peace and love and joy to face what is happening in our world and in our lives!

How can we face what is happening in our world, what is happening in our nation and what is happening in some of our families in the way of tragedy and heartache? As you know, Grace is not just a topic for discussion. It is a way of life... to live a grace-filled life is a gift of God as we hear in Ephesians 2:8,9:



We continue in the book of Acts with how this amazing grace was active with Saul in our lectionary passage for today:

<sup>7</sup>The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. <sup>8</sup>Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. <sup>9</sup>For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

What would Saul have been thinking? He must have been filled with fear of what happened to him. Yes? How often have we thought about certain trials and tribulations that have happened in our lives and wondered, what did I do to deserve this? Saul, being a religious man of his Jewish faith must have thought what have I done to deserve this?

We continue with verse 10 and listen carefully to what this passage says about Saul:

<sup>10</sup> Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' He answered, 'Here I am, Lord.' <sup>11</sup>The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, <sup>12</sup>and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.' <sup>13</sup>But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; <sup>14</sup>and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.' <sup>15</sup>But

the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; <sup>16</sup>I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.' <sup>17</sup>So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>18</sup>And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, <sup>19</sup>and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Now, I cannot and will not speak for you, but for me if I were Ananias, I would have had other words for the Lord in wanting me to give sight back to a man who caused a great deal of suffering with the followers of the Way. What comes to mind would have been something like this: "Okay, Lord, I hear you, but are you out of your Superior Mind? Look what Saul has done and how in the world can you want to restore his vision? I don't understand, Lord!"

We may not always understand the mystery of how certain things or even certain people can be used for a greater good and we may not want to help when the Spirit moves us to help in a given situation, but we must. Hear these words again that convinced Ananias he must restore Saul's vision:

<sup>5</sup>But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; <sup>16</sup>I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.'

Probably against his better judgment, Ananias restored Saul's vision and Saul became known as Paul who not only was transformed, he became an apostle to make disciples for the transformation of the world.

When we are in doubt of this amazing grace, we can look to the promise in this verse:



I would like to come back to this hymn striving to describe God's Amazing Grace. Some of you know the story in the writing of this hymn.

## The Story Behind Amazing Grace

This song isn't a song of theology—it's John Newton's own heartfelt expression of gratitude to God, who helped him turn from his profane and wicked life and eventually fight against the ills he practiced. Later in life, Newton became a supporter and inspiration to William Wilberforce who led the fight to pass the British Slave Trade Act in 1807, which abolished the slave trade in that empire.

That day at the helm, March 21, 1748, was a day Newton remembered ever after, for "On that day the Lord sent from on high and delivered me out of deep waters." Many years later, as an old man, Newton wrote in his diary of March 21, 1805: "Not well able to write; but I endeavor to observe the return of this day with humiliation, prayer, and praise." Only God's amazing grace could and would take a rude, profane, slave-trading sailor and transform him into a child of God. Newton never ceased to stand in awe of God's work in his life.

*From John Newton Discovered Amazing Grace @Christianity.com*

It is this amazing grace that not only inspires us as followers of Christ, it is this amazing grace that takes someone like Saul and someone like John Newton, and transforms them in every way possible. Imagine how Saul persecuted the followers of the Way and how John Newton caused so much in the way of suffering for thousands and thousands of slaves and their families and yet God forgave them and God used them as instruments of Grace of healing and reconciliation. We too are called to be instruments of God's love.

Let prepare for the Sacrament of Holy Communion in sharing in the prayer of St. Francis responsively:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred

**Let me sow love.**

Where there is injury, pardon.

**Where there is doubt, faith.**

Where there is despair, hope.

**Where there is darkness, light.**

Where there is sadness, joy.

**Amen and by the grace of God, may it be so!**

**Special Music # 2253**    *Water, River, Spirit, Grace*    Sharon Smith  
(congregation, please join in on the 3rd time) *(words on screen)*

*Water, River, Spirit, Grace*

*Sweep over me, sweep over me!*

*Recarve the depths your fingers traced*

*In sculpting me, in sculpting me.*

[Water, River, Spirit, Grace](#)