



West Grove United Methodist Church
The Reverend Monica B. Guepet
300 N. Guernsey Road, West Grove, PA 19390
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“DO Justifying Grace”

Good Morning! I am Janice Bowers, a Christ Servant Minister here at West Grove United Methodist Church. Pastor Monica is on a well-deserved vacation this week with her family and I have been given the privilege to speak with you this morning.

You have been listening to some of the music and highlights from our VBS week on the Rolling River Rampage. I participated in this fun adventure with our rafters in the Bible Story Station. We found adventure, acceptance, joy, rest and peace on the river as we heard stories that started in the beginning of Jesus' ministry with the calling of the first disciples and ended with His Great Commission to the disciples and his final ascent into heaven.

All of our lessons tied-in one way or another to our sermon: DO Justifying Grace. We began our series of sermons this month with an overview of John and Charles Wesley and the beginnings of the Methodist Church. Last week, Pastor Monica explored with us prevenient grace. The first of three kinds of graces in United Methodist theology.

John Wesley talked of grace as the house that God builds for us and he said that prevenient grace was the front porch of that house. We stand on the porch trying to decide whether to go in or not. It would seem everyone has a choice whether they go in the door or not.

At VBS the children heard about the calling of the first disciples. I held up my cell phone and asked for some of the things that we could use our phones for. The answers alone could have filled up the memory on my phone. I then asked what we do when we call someone and they do not answer. This was an easy solution when I was their age, after many, many rings you just hung up. Even from those at the tender age of 5, I received a long list of options that are now available to us today. The purpose of this exercise was to let the children know that Jesus has left a message for us in the Bible and this is He is calling us to be disciples too.

With prevenient grace – it is a yes or a no. God extends the invitation, we just need to respond. The children saw prevenient grace in Peter and Andrew and James and John who were doing their work as fishermen when Jesus called them to follow him. They could continue to go about their work or they could drop everything and follow Jesus. They chose to immediately change their everyday lives and follow Jesus – prevenient grace at work.

Today, we will be rolling into the topic of the second kind of grace; justifying grace. Back to the analogy of the house, Wesley considered justifying grace as the doorway and our walking over the threshold into the house of God's salvation.

The best example for the children this week of justifying grace was in the story of Zacchaeus. They learned that Zacchaeus was a little man with a big problem – sin! Zacchaeus was one of the most hated men in Jericho. He was the chief tax collector and he had become very rich because he cheated people by collecting more taxes than they owed and keeping it for himself. It was God's grace that motivated Zacchaeus to climb a sycamore tree so he could be tall enough to see Jesus as he entered the city among throngs of people.

When Jesus looked up in the tree and said “Zacchaeus, you come down, for I am going to your house today” we were able to see when Zacchaeus chose to accept justifying grace. He crossed the threshold and entered his home with Jesus. Because he was sorry for what he had done and confessed his sin, Jesus forgave him. Zacchaeus then began living a new life.

We read in the Gospel of Luke that Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house....For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost”. At the moment of salvation, God declares us justified. We are no longer guilty of our sins and we are on the path of eternal life. The children learned

through this and other stories that even though we all will do things that are wrong, the grace of God keeps us in His love as long as we recognize what we have done, say we are sorry to God and work to not do the same thing again.

We learn in Our Wesleyan Heritage that this process of salvation that happens when we receive justifying grace involves a change in us that is called conversion. Conversion is turning around, leaving one orientation for another. It can be sudden or dramatic, or gradual and cumulative. You have probably heard this referenced as one of the following: rebirth, new life in Christ, healing, regeneration or born again.

The children learned in the story of Mary and Martha that justifying grace gives us full assurance that God will love us no more if we perform well and love us no less if we perform poorly. While Martha had worked hard to make Jesus feel welcome in her home by making it clean and preparing a meal, Mary simply sat and listened to all that Jesus had to say. Jesus accepted Mary and Martha's differences and he loved them just the way they were. The key to both women is that they had faith in Jesus as their Savior.

On the last day of VBS, the children heard the story of the Great Commission. Jesus met with the disciples on the Mount of Olives on his last day on earth after the resurrection. Jesus told the disciples that it was their job going forward to tell the world about the saving grace of Jesus. Jesus said to them "I've received all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them everything I've commanded you." Once conversion has occurred, we cannot help but share God's love with others. We may backslide from time to time, but God's grace remains solid and continues to call us toward wholeness and salvation. From this point forward, we begin sanctifying grace which we will hear more about next week. Furthermore, Jesus would always be with them and will be with us through the work of the Holy Spirit who is within each of us.

The early Methodists supported one another in growing in grace by having what was named the General Rule:

- The public worship of God
- The ministry of the Word, either read or expounded
- The supper of the Lord
- Family and private prayer
- Searching the scriptures
- Fasting or abstinence

Except for the final rule (the kids had great snacks throughout the week!), our children at VBS experienced this grace support system. They:

- Celebrated God together through song and activities
- At the Bible Story Station they heard stories directly from the Bible and received life applications to follow
- One specific story and lesson that was covered was the Lord's Supper
- Throughout the day, the children were led in prayer. In Bible, they experienced different ways in which they could pray.
- Aside from daily scripture reference in story time, we had the Rapid Ready Verse they all could recite to you now "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you" Isaiah 43:2.

The important thing to remember is that wherever we are at in God's house of grace, we are all recipients of God's free and unmerited gift of new life through the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross.

And now, as we head into a new week of love and service to our Lord Jesus Christ, May the LORD bless you and protect you. May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you. May the LORD show you his favor and give you his peace. AMEN.