

## BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED – EPHESIANS 2:8

- I Our Epistle reading from Ephesians 2 began with these words: You were dead ...  
 You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient.
- II For us to know that we can be physically alive yet spiritually dead – even from birth – is vital!
- A Article IX of the 39 Articles refers to this doctrine as Original or Birth-Sin.
- B Article IX further declares that *Original Sin is the fault and corruption of the Nature of everyone that is the offspring of Adam; ... and therefore every person born into this world deserves God's wrath and damnation.*
- III Original sin, however, makes no sense unless we apply it to ourselves. When I was born, I was spiritually dead!
- A In America, fundamentalist and evangelical preachers convince many that although spiritually dead, they can cooperate with God and make a decision for Christ.
- B If one, however, is spiritually dead, how can one make a decision for Christ?
- IV Nevertheless, Paul clearly declares: God... out of the great love with which He loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ ...
- A God alone made us alive.

- B Paul continued: By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast.
- V Note well that the word *grace* appears 3 times in the 10 verses of our text.
- Grace has suffered many definitions, but I prefer to define it as:
- the love of the unlovely
  - the love of the unloving
  - the love of the unlovable
- VI Intersecting with the Epistle reading, our Gospel reading for today records a portion of the conversation between Jesus and a learned member of the Sanhedrin named Nicodemus.
- A If we had read the first 13 verses of Chapter 3 of John, we would have encountered Jesus' response to Nicodemus' declaration: We know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.
- B Jesus was not inclined to discuss theology, so He proceeded to inform Nicodemus what he (and we) needed to know: Unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.
- C Puzzled, Nicodemus asked:  
How can a man be born when he is old?
- D The answer was nothing like the curious case of Benjamin Button.
- E No one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit,

- F The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so it is everyone who is born of the Spirit.
- G The question arises, then, how is one born again?
- VII The answer resides in the text: Jesus said that we are born again by water and the Spirit, but how does the Holy Spirit work through water?
- A In Titus 3:5, Paul stated: God our Savior saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.
- B This is a great mystery, but when the Priest repeats the words of Christ over the water *in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*, simple water becomes a vehicle of the Spirit.
- C Some may come to faith prior to Baptism thereby receiving a new touch of the Spirit when Baptized.
- VIII Once again, our 39 Articles includes Article XXVII concerning Baptism and explains that, they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church; the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the children of God by the Holy Spirit, are visibly signed and sealed;  
Faith is confirmed, and Grace is increased by virtue of prayer unto God.
- IX I must add, however, that works are not totally excluded in our text from Ephesians.  
Paul wrote: We are what He has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

- X Thus, after Baptism and faith have been received, we are prepared to do good works – the practical purpose of the grace of Baptism.
- XI And the origin of this amazing grace is stated in the Gospel:
- XII God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.
- XIII God's love is the genesis of grace and the operation of grace.
- XIV Jesus explicitly proclaimed: God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.
- XV How extraordinary that God would send His Son for me.
- A Think of someone you do not like or does not like you.
- B If you had an only child, would you send him or her into death on behalf of that person?
- C I suppose that is why the grace of God is so difficult to comprehend.
- D God's grace transcends our experiences and our inclinations.
- XVI We are prone to seek revenge, and the events in our lives do not normally involve receiving grace.
- XVII Through the rebirth we experience in our Baptism and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we have the opportunity to be transformed into Jesus' disciples.
- XVIII The community in which we live will not be drawn to Jesus by us condemning them.
- XIX They will be drawn to Him by simple folk like us living lives loving as we have been loved and forgiving as we have been forgiven.

Let us pray:

God of mercy, who sent your Son into the world not to condemn it but to save it, open our eyes to behold Jesus lifted up on the cross and to see in those outstretched arms your abundant compassion.

May the weary and wounded of this world come to know that by your gracious gift we are saved and delivered, so immeasurable is the love with which you love the world.

We ask this through Christ, with whom you have raised us up in Baptism. Amen.