

# John 1:1-3, 14, 16-17

Advent 3, Supplement Series B, December 17, 2017

Theme: Sola Gratia: Only Grace

I. It is amazing who Jesus is      II. It is amazing what Jesus does  
INJ I can get help nearly every place I turn. The person at the store wants to help me. I can call customer service. My children are home from college so I have help with chores around the house.

I may have to determine how much help I want. At the grocery store, I can self-checkout, or have someone put things in bags for me. One time the computer specialist remotely controlled my computer and fixed things while I watched. That was weird! When the driveway needs clearing, should I grab a snow shovel with the kids, or let them do it all? How much help do I require or desire?

Those standard-type questions tend to find their way into the way we talk about God. When we need help, we go to the Lord in prayer. If the diagnosis is difficult, we ask God to help us get through it. Our burdens are heavy, and we cannot do it alone!

The question I want you to think about today is this: if you cannot meet all your spiritual needs alone, how much help do you need? If the spiritual battle is beyond your ability, do you need just a little bit of help to get you over the top? Do you need help to get started, or along the way, but you can finish alone? Are you willing to admit that you really don't need help, what you need is a Savior?

God sent a Savior, not just a helper. He didn't leave any part of our eternal future in our hands. He even took action out of his own initiative, not waiting for us to ask. The verses before us from John's Gospel emphasize a Lutheran truth repeated for the 500 years of the Reformation. Sola Gratia: Only Grace. It is amazing who Jesus is, and it is amazing what Jesus does!

Grace is the word we use to describe why God stepped in to rescue sinners from death and hell. Grace is God's undeserved love. No one purchased God's services so that he is obligated to do the job. No one can impose on God so he owes us a favor. It is undeserved love. We aren't even so cute that he just has to do something. God didn't have to step in to this cursed world, and he shouldn't have wanted to. Yet he did. Grace. Undeserved. Out of his

own love, God took action. Sola Gratia: Only grace.

God's grace is amazing when you consider who Jesus is. John tells us Jesus is the Word of Creation: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him everything was made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made." The Second Person of the Triune God is described here. He is eternal. That means: before time was, the Word existed. When time began, the Word brought it into being. How the three Persons of the Trinity relate to each other is a mystery, but they share the characteristics of the One God: Eternal, Almighty, Unchanging, All-knowing, Present everywhere.

God isn't human, with all the limitations we have. Whatever he wants to do, he can do. Nothing he does is bad or wrong or evil, for he is holy. Think of what is pure, without any contamination – that is God. The Second Person of the Trinity is pure, holy. The Word of Creation is without blemish, stain or spot.

The holy God doesn't need you. Yet he made you. Not only did he make you, but when you ruined it all with sin, he didn't trash you. Look at the mess we have brought to a world that at one time was pristine and thoroughly good! Now there is hard work and pain and frustration. Anger that things don't work right. Relationships that crumble or explode. The curse of sin thoroughly corrupts our existence. It brings death, separation from God and his good gifts.

Grace is that God took action to save sinners. Not just to help, but to rescue us. Entirely out of his goodness (undeserved), he stepped in to save. He didn't just help us manage, but he absolutely defeated sin and death and the devil. He completely rescued us for himself forever. In accomplishing our salvation, God did all the work. Not you. Not me. Not in the slightest. Only grace.

The Second Person of the Trinity, the Creating Word, who exists from all eternity to all eternity, he entered humanity, entered time, entered flesh. "The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." God became fully human. This was not a trick or a sleight of hand. It isn't a joke or a tall tale. Almighty God placed himself under the law he

proclaimed for people. All knowing God was conceived miraculously in the womb of a virgin. Present everywhere God was in one place, born in a stable, swaddled in cloths. Grace is what Christmas is about!

Grace can be seen in God's action. Jesus, who is God and human, stands in our place. There he kept every command of God that we have broken countless times. Jesus loved his neighbor as himself and always honored the Heavenly Father. Jesus was pure in thoughts and words and actions, he is holy and righteous in every way. That isn't something you can buy or earn or deserve. Yet God declares you holy in Christ. Blameless. Pure. You don't deserve it, but he gives it to you by undeserved love. *Sola Gratia: Only grace.*

Grace is bigger than that. The God who stood in flesh to keep the law for us perfectly, also willingly accepted the punishment we deserve for our disobedience. He bore the curse of death, the mockery of despicable sinners, the shame of crucifixion, the forsakenness of the Father. Jesus paid the debt we owed with his blood. John writes about seeing the glory of the Word made flesh, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father. That glory isn't flashy glitz and glamor. Glory is his humble carrying of the cross, for you. It is grace that saves, not anything else. See God's amazing grace for you in what Jesus does. He is your Substitute. He is your Savior.

The events of Christmas happened years ago. Who needs an ancient message about ideas strange to our brains when everything is a Google search or an Amazon order away? Who needs it? You do. I do. We all do. Think about how much help you need, spiritually. Not just a little. Not even a lot of help. We don't just need help. We need a Savior. Jesus is that Savior. He works *Sola Gratia: only by grace.*

500 years ago the message of grace alone was buried under thick layers of human traditions and rationalizations. People generally accepted that God was a helper, and that they had to do their part to achieve forgiveness or heaven. Words like the ones we read from John's gospel worked on Martin Luther so he came to see *Sola Gratia*. We are saved only by grace.

People were not different back then. Still today it is popular to think that we can influence God for good things. You might be able to admit that you have thought of it that way, too. Why is God nice to me? Why? Because I go to church. I live a decent life. I try hard. I

do my part. I give my offerings and my time. Absolutely not!

Those are all good things, but they don't earn favors from God. Think about the Word John writes about. How could you influence the Word of Creation? How could you score points with the Pure Almighty All-knowing God? How would your measly actions influence God entering human flesh at Christmas? How can what you do add or subtract anything from Jesus' death and resurrection? You are not a part of it, except to receive it. God gives it to you! This is his undeserved love for you. *Sola Gratia: Only grace.*

Baptism is evidence of God's grace. What has that baby done to deserve the love of God? Only the opposite, right? God tells us that people are sinful from conception. Our experience shows us that even babies express greed and selfishness and anger. That sinful baby can't do anything to make God favorably disposed or to deserve good things. Yet what did we see? God's word connected with water, and God gave his Holy Spirit. God forgave sins. God put faith into the heart of a baby. God adopted her into his family. *Sola Gratia.*

The thing about God's grace is that he doesn't stop giving it to us. God's undeserved love comes again and again through the word of the Bible. He has a pointed message for you if all you want is a little help: You can't make it that way. God acts alone in Christ. He saves through faith in him. You have grace, God's undeserved love. When you are weary and worn out, he says I am your refuge and strength. When sin has taken hold, he says I am your peace and forgiveness. I am your Savior. *Sola Gratia.*

John writes about the proclamation of God's undeserved love to us. "For out of his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." God is so full of grace that he repeats his love again and again. Grace upon grace is yours in Jesus. Grace comes to you every time you worship. Grace comes to you every time what Jesus has done is in view. If you wander, if you are afraid, if you worry: Look at Jesus. He is God in the flesh who has come to you. Isn't it amazing who he is? Jesus has accomplished the forgiveness of your sins. Isn't it amazing what he has done? How much help do you need? Jesus isn't merely a helper. He is your Savior. That is grace. Amazing Grace. *Sola gratia. SDG Amen.*