

Our opening hymn, "Amazing Grace," is one of the best-known hymns there is. Especially during times of tragedy and death we hear its familiar melody sung by a soloist, or played on bagpipes. But do those who hear that hymn, or those who have sung it, do they know what God's grace is? Do you know what God's grace is all about?

This hymn about grace doesn't mention the greatest act of God's grace. I'm sure many Christians can't help but think about God's greatest act of grace as they sing the words. What is God's greatest act of grace? He gave his one and only Son, Jesus, to die for our sins and to rise from the dead for our forgiveness.

Just as the past couple of days of our Wisconsin weather allowed us to see the sun and enjoy its warmth, so let's enjoy the warmth of "**God and His Son and Their Amazing Grace**" today.

What are of the 2 most exciting times of the year for a child? It has to be Christmas and their birthday. They were for me when I was a kid and I they were for our 4 boys growing up.

Did your parents, give you gifts based on how good you were? No. Did you, as a parent, give gifts based on how good your kids were? No. If that were true, we'd never have gotten one gift as kids, and we would have saved a lot of money buying them.

Christmas and birthdays are all about giving gifts and receiving gifts in spite of how we behaved. St. Paul says it's the same way with God. We haven't been good or nice and yet, his grace drives him to give us gifts anyway. Today we're going to concentrate on how "**God and His Son in Their Amazing Grace**" gives you 3 gifts!

Gift 1: A New Life Gifts are easily taken for granted. Walk into a health care center or a retirement community and look around. All of them were younger - like you. Sooner or later, we all become painfully aware that we're dying - some slower than others, some faster. If we live long enough, we will lose the abilities that we associate with life. Like it or not, you'll need someone to

drive you, to feed you, to dress you and change you. Appreciate life right now.

In an even more graphic way - Paul takes us to a graveyard and walks you past a gravestone that has your name on it and one with mine. He points out: **We were dead in transgressions and sins.** The picture the Bible paints of death is the ugliest thing there is. We weren't just ugly, or lazy, or stained with a little smudge of sin. We were dead - completely helpless in our sins. There was nothing attractive in us that made God pick us. He didn't look at you and say: "*Hey, that corpse isn't too ugly. It's only a little stinky with a little decay. I think I'll choose that one.*"

Nobody loves to look at a dead body. Neither does God. But there's one more dead and lifeless body we need to look at. It's on the cross. That's where we see a Holy God unleash his wrath and anger on his one and only Son. He shouldn't have been on the cross. He was perfect in every sense of the Word. He had no transgressions or sins. **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.**

The sight of his dead body gives life to our souls - proving once again **God and His Son and Their Amazing Grace** gives us new life. Instead of leaving his body in the grave, Christ rose back to life. Sins, all sins, have been paid for. We thank God for his gift of new life. Without it, we'd still be staring at death without any hope.

Gift 2: A New Home If a new life was the only gift that God gave us, that would be enough. But we have a generous gift giver who has more to share. But we lose sight of them. A child opens one Christmas present and becomes so fascinated with it they never take the time to open the other ones.

Paul explains our new home: **God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.** Verb tenses are so important when it comes to God's Word. Paul uses the past tense - **raised up and seated.** From the

way Paul saw it, the Ephesians were already seated and living in heaven with Jesus.

Is that hard to understand? Paul said the same thing to the Christians in Philippi: **“Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.”** And in Colosse: **“You have been raised with Christ where he is seated at the right hand of God.”** And in Cudahy: We have a new home in heaven – which, according to Paul, we are occupying right now.

“But I don’t feel like I’m in heaven. I don’t see Jesus or his angels. I’m still suffering pain and the impact of sin.” Notice that all of these terms have a catch phrase that Paul repeats - you are raised **WITH CHRIST** and God seated us **WITH HIM** in the heavenly realms. Since Christ lived a perfect life, died, and rose again, God considers this as good as you having done it. Believers in Christ live through Christ. When your favorite sports team wins, how do you celebrate? You don’t say: *“They won!”* You shout: *“We won!”* You are part of the team winning. Believers in Christ live through Christ.

Jesus wants us to think of ourselves as being so connected with him that wherever he goes we go. It’s not as if we’re actually living in heaven, but since our Savior is living there, it’s as good as done in God’s eyes.

How did all of this happen to us? God details his process in v.8,9: **1) by grace (undeserved love) 2) you have been saved (something was done to us) 3) through faith 4) not from ourselves (remember, we’re dead) 5) it is the gift (given to us) 6) of God (even faith is God’s gift) 7) not of works, so that no one can boast.** Did you notice how he eliminates even the slightest hint that we did anything to get our new home in heaven. Again, it points to **“God and His Son and Their Amazing Grace.”**

Gift 3: A New Job A new job? How is that a gift of God’s grace? It’s wonderful to hear that God has given us a new life and a new home – how do you feel about your new job?

What was your first job? You liked the idea of getting paid, but after a while, you began to rethink it. It was more work than you wanted. That’s how many see the Christian faith - too much work. “I

have to go church every week! I have to give money! I have to donate time. I have to be nice to people! No thanks!” Let’s be honest. Even though heaven is free, being a Christian is a job and it requires hard work.

How come? Paul tells us: **“We are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.”** There seems to be a huge contradiction here. As Lutheran Christians we like to keep the main thing the main thing. We believe the Bible truth that we are saved by God’s grace alone. And yet, Ephesians 2:10 jumps out at us: **We are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.**

Yes, we’re saved by God’s grace alone. No question about that! But God also created us to do good works. This verse teaches us that our response to salvation by grace alone is good works. Martin Luther picked up on that in his explanation to the First Article of the Apostles’ Creed where we confessed earlier: **All this God does only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven and not because I have earned or deserved it.** That’s grace! **For all this I ought to thank and praise, to serve and obey him.** That’s good works! Serving and obeying God refers to an active faith, a faith that responds to saving grace by doing good works.

Are you always a willing worker for Jesus? Has being a Christian gotten old? When you got a new job, you were eager and happy and couldn’t wait to show the boss how well you could do. But after a while, your enthusiasm wore down.

The same thing can happen as a Christian. Many have been on the job for a long time. Living the Christian life wears you down. It’s more like a chore. That’s your lazy old Adam whispering in your ear: *“You already know that Bible stuff. Let someone else talk about Christ. Let someone else do the work.”*

What did Paul tell you earlier? That lazy old Adam is dead. Why are you listening to a dead man? You’ve got a NEW LIFE to live, a NEW HOME in heaven and a NEW JOB. Sure, it’s hard, but remember who you’re working for ... as you thank **God and His Son and Their Amazing Grace** for these gifts. Enjoy them every day!