

First Sunday after Epiphany

Grace, mercy and peace are yours because of God's love which fills us with the hope of eternal life every day.

NIV Titus 3: 8 This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Introduction: Everything I needed to know I learned in Kindergarten. By Robert Fulghum "These are the things I learned: Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don't take things that aren't yours. Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody. Wash your hands before you eat. Flush. Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you. Learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work some every day. Take a nap every afternoon." But you and I know that knowing and doing are not the same. We don't follow that knowledge up with the appropriate actions in word and deeds. I believe the Apostle Paul would agree that everything we need to know we learn in baptism. But the problem is that we do not remember or put that knowledge into practice. Seven times the Apostle Paul uses the word trustworthy when talking to his two young Christian friends who were actively building the family of God. Talking about Christian leaders, he says to Titus, "He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message." In our text for today, the Apostle Paul tells Titus the trustworthy message is, 4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Everything we need to know we learn in Baptism

We are saved by mercy

We are justified by grace

We are devoted to God our Savior

1) **We are saved by mercy**

What's the most important life lesson you have learned? It might be that the world is a dangerous place. In the real world, it is a dog eat dog world, eat or be eaten, the survival of the fittest. The strong survive; the weak feed the strong! From little on, I learned that people step on each other to get ahead, to get what they want. From friends in school betraying me to being a father and encouraging my children to "beat" out their friends at practice to get a starting spot. Eat or be eaten, fight or be beaten, take or be taken. The Apostle Paul knew about this world's survival mode. He reminded Titus, we too lived like that – hating and being hated. That lifestyle of eat or be eaten is a trick, a deception. It doesn't get us ahead to where we want to be in the end. It still leads us as slaves to unhappiness, envy, being hated and hating each other. And in the end, we will wake up one day only to find our lives over on earth, unfulfilled and staring at an eternity of sadness, pain and regret in hell forever.

But our baptism changes everything. By our baptism God connected us to Jesus Christ, who broke free from that slavery to this hate and be hated life. He lived a life full of kindness, love and mercy all for us. In baptism, we are rescued from our old slavery to our sinful instincts of eat or be eaten, predator or prey. We now through baptism into Christ are free to live forever guilt free today and pain free into eternity.

How could we ever escape from our own basic sinful instincts of self preservation and the fight for survival? We couldn't ever by our own ability rise above this dog eat dog world. That's why we must remember God saved us because of His mercy.

Mercy relies on only one thing: the kind heart of an individual. Not performance, not fairness, not the score, not an agreement or deal, nothing but the kindness found in a heart. The Lord saw us in our slavery of hating and being hated and showed mercy to us sinners. In baptism, we are shown God's mercy, when the sinner brings nothing to the font, no promise, no commitment, no performance, but simply

bringing his sinfulness, his basic sinful nature of hating and fighting to survive. And there God comes to the sinner and gives him a new heart, a new mind connecting him to the heart and mind of Jesus Christ.

2) We are justified by Grace

The heart and mind of Christ is so different from our sinful instincts. Jesus' heart and mind never thought of how he could get ahead or how he could get his. His heart and mind were filled with love for others, for us. When he walked the earth, his heart went out to the sick and diseased and the demon possessed and he healed them. When he saw crowds of sinners, his heart would break because as he said, they were like sheep without a shepherd. And when he heard and saw the supposed shepherds of the sinners, his heart burned with anger against them, for their lies and plans to lead sinners away from God's love in the Savior. Even on the cross, the heart of Jesus overflowed for his Mother to be cared for at his death and for the soldiers that nailed him to the tree, "Father, forgive them they know not what they are doing."

All of Jesus' love for sinners shows us what God's grace is all about – undeserved kindness. It's simply unfair, unjust. It is illogical and unreasonable to think that Jesus would love the soldiers who harmed him or the people that rejected him along with the countless sinners hating him for not filling their bellies with food or the garages with SUVs.

Through baptism, you and I are justified by grace. Because of our baptism which connects us to Jesus Christ's heart and mind, God looks at us and declares us His perfect children. God smiles on us and is happy with us and says just like he said at Jesus' Baptism, "This is my Son who I love, and with him I am well pleased. That is grace. We are justified by God's grace is undeserved, unfair, illogical, and unreasonable.

3) We are devoted to Christ

There is a reason why every sermon I preach begins with "Grace, mercy and peace are yours..." Because our natural instincts, our natural sinful heart and mind simply will not and cannot trust that message! The consequences of following our natural heart and mind is that we go back to our old slavery of hating and being hated, envious, jealous, fighting for what's ours, stepping on others and preying on the weak.

Have you seen these businesses that have the fish logo in their advertising or signs? What does that mean? I suppose if we think with our sinful instincts in this eat or be eaten world, we would say, "They are just trying to get more business from Christians, that now I'm supposed to go there because I'm Christian." But wait a second, could it be that they are different? Could it be that being a Christian means that you have a new heart and a new mind that thinks of others first, is filled with God's love so that they don't need to fight for every dollar or every inch, but instead treat others with respect, kindness and fairness?

As Christians we are devoted to Jesus Christ our Lord because he saved us with His mercy and grace. We don't have to fight for our own lives. We don't have to eat or be eaten, attack or be attacked. Our Lord and Savior won the battle for our lives already. Our Lord lives in heaven, protecting us today! We can now with fear show mercy and undeserved love because we are devoted to Jesus Christ. Remember your baptism. It changes everything.

Some lessons we learned in Kindergarten we need reminders of everyday – like sharing. We complain about traffic, the line at the grocery store, or that last parking spot. Share. We drive so aggressively like no one else belongs on OUR road. We talk like no one else in our country deserves help except us. Remember the elementary lesson we learned in baptism. We are saved by God's mercy, justified by God's grace and now we are devoted to Jesus Christ.