

Receiving God's Grace – Even When It's Not Easy

Pastor's Perspective:

Mrs. Lees taught third grade Sunday School in a Lutheran church before, during, and after the time I grew up in that congregation. I thought about Mrs. Lees recently when I read that “state-of-the-art media technology in that era was the flannelgraph, a large board wrapped in flannel and perched on an easel.” I can see and hear and smell Mrs. Lees’ room with the flannelgraph she used to tell Bible stories. Some of us have memories of personal experience with that “technology.” The rest of us simply smirk about the ways of the past century.

The article that helped me have that intense sensory memory further described the paper character of Paul used by a different teacher in a different church building than Mrs. Lees, but with the same technology. Over time that paper Paul suffered terribly. “Someone spilled Kool-Aid on him which left him purple. Another time we tore his little head off. Paul was taped together.” I chuckled at that image.

Further along the article says, “When we look at the leading characters in scripture, it’s clear that they’re all stained and taped together. Even when they faithfully follow their calling, conflict is always waiting around the corner. It is only God’s grace that keeps them taped together.” And that grabbed me and yanked me from the past century into this very moment that God has given to you and me.

The results of the CAT survey and their interpretation describe a congregation that has high satisfaction with what is happening and high energy to participate in it continuing. That is exciting and satisfying and flattering. There is also a holy caution in that description. You have said while discussing the results, “We are strong and attractive. A lot of pastors will be interested in us.” That is for The Spirit to decide. I know that I was during my first conversation (interview) with the call committee 13½ years ago. I still am.

The holy caution is that It’s Not Easy. There will always be things that feel like you are drowning in purple Kool-Aid or that your head is being torn off. Conflict is always waiting around the corner. That’s not my opinion. That’s what the people of the Bible and their stories teach us. That’s be to God for that. Without that holy caution we might be tempted to think that *we* are the cause of it all, that *we* are better than other people and congregations, that *we* can do it on our own. We can’t. It is only God’s grace that keeps us taped together. God’s grace has kept us, you and me, taped together even when It’s Not Easy. My earnest prayer is that God’s grace continues doing that. My hope is that we remain aware of our continuing need for that grace and remain open to receiving it.

Pastor Gary