

Grace and Favor

January 7, 2007

(Epiphany 1 - Year C)

Acts 10: 34-38

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

When I was growing up, when I was in preschool, I had a favorite pair of jeans.

My favorite pair of jeans were green (can you tell that this was in the 60s?).

And, I loved to wear my green jeans, first of all, because they reminded me of Mr. Green Jeans, from my favorite TV show, the Captain Kangaroo show.

Also, I loved my favorite green jeans because I wore them so often that they had become soft and comfortable.

All of us have favorites.

Some of us have a favorite uncle or a favorite ice cream or a favorite TV show.

When we goof around on the internet and we find a website that we like, we bookmark that website and put it into our favorites.

All of us have favorites,

And, in the Bible, God had his favorites, as well.

In the Bible, God's favorite people are his chosen people.

God's favorite people are the Hebrew people, the people whom we now call the Jewish people.

For, we learn in the book of Genesis that God chose Abraham to be the father of many nations, and through Abraham, the Hebrew people became God's chosen people.¹

Through Abraham, God book-marked the Hebrew people and put them into God's favorites menu.

¹ Genesis 17: 4-8

But, the good news of Jesus Christ is that *all of us* are on God's favorites menu.

Just two weeks ago, we read the Christmas story from the Gospel of Luke, where an angel of the Lord said to the shepherds:

“Do not be afraid; for behold - I am bringing good news of great joy to *all the people.*”²

And, after Jesus is crucified and risen,
After Jesus's spirit is poured out upon all at Pentecost,
A Roman soldier named Cornelius is visited by an angel of God.
Cornelius is told by the angel to go and find the apostle Peter.

Now, Cornelius is *not* a Jew,
Cornelius is *not* one of God's chosen people,
Cornelius is *not* considered to be one of God's favorites.
But, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Cornelius becomes one of God's favorites, as well.

And, in response to this encounter between Cornelius and Peter that is recorded in the Book of Acts, Peter shouts out:

“I truly understand that God shows no partiality,”³
I truly understand that God does not play favorites.

Peter, who is blown away by this radical movement of the Holy Spirit, then asks:

“Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”⁴

Today [at the 10 o'clock service] we have the privilege of being a part of a Baptism - the Baptism of Grace Callan.

This baptism is special to me because it is the first baptism since I have

² Luke 2: 10

³ Acts 10: 34

⁴ Acts 10: 47

been at St. Alban's.

This baptism is special to this community of St. Alban's because, I believe, it is just one more piece of evidence that we are healthy and growing and that we intend to baptize many more people in the years to come.

And, this baptism is special, I believe, because we are baptizing a little girl whose name is Grace, whom we pray today will grow in grace. We are baptizing Grace, whom we pray will be an example to us of the grace and the favor of God.

For, ever since Grace Callan was born, I have been struck several times over the significance of her name - Grace.

The word 'grace' is a church-y word that we often don't think about much anymore.

The word 'grace' can be a difficult word to define.

Yet, in the back of The Book of Common Prayer is a section called the Catechism, which tells us the teaching of the Church.

The Catechism is written in question and answer format.

Thus, I like to call the Catechism the "frequently asked questions - or FAQs - of the Church."

In this teaching, the question is asked:

"What is grace?"

And, the answer is this:

"Grace is God's favor towards us, unearned and undeserved."

The word 'grace' means God's favor.

And, to receive grace means to become one of God's favor-ites.

When Jesus had been baptized in the Jordan River, a voice came from heaven, saying;

"You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased."⁵

At Jesus' baptism, Jesus knew that God was well pleased with him, that

⁵ Luke 3: 22

God's favor was upon him.

When the apostle Peter, a Jew, entered the house of Cornelius, a non-Jew, Peter discovered that God does not play favorites. And, at Cornelius' baptism, Cornelius was chosen by God and received God's favor and grace.

And, at Grace's baptism today, we know that God is well pleased with her,
That God has chosen her,
That God has put her into his favorites menu.

However, if we are like the apostle Peter, and say:
"I truly understand that God shows no partiality,"
Then, why is it that we always want to pick favorites?
Why do *we* have such a hard time showing no partiality?
Why do we have such a hard time giving grace and favor to others?

In this last week in America, we have been listening to the tributes to the late President Gerald Ford.
As I listened to President Ford's friends and colleagues speak on TV, some of the great attributes that they mentioned about Gerald Ford were his bi-partisanship, his ability to deal with everyone, his grace-filled relationships.
The friends and colleagues of Gerald Ford spoke of how he treated everyone equally, that he showed no partiality.

For, the good news of Jesus Christ,
The good news of the Christmas angels,
The good news of the new friendship between the apostle Peter and Cornelius,
Is that God's favor and grace are poured out on all of us.
God shows no partiality and plays no favorites.
For, God is well pleased with all of us.

Therefore, *we* should imitate God and show grace and favor, unearned and undeserved, to *everyone*:

Grace and favor in our homes and in our workplaces.

Grace and favor to Republicans and Democrats.

Grace and favor to Jews and Christians and Muslims and those who
don't know what to believe.

God shows no partiality and plays no favorites,

And neither should we.

For, God is well pleased with all of us.

In the Sacrament of Baptism, by water and the Holy Spirit, God pours
out his grace and favor, unearned, undeserved, with no partiality.

In the Sacrament of Baptism, God plays no favorites, but pours out grace
upon grace...upon Grace.

AMEN.

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