**October 24, 2021 Acts 10:25-44**

***Sneaky Grace***

**Scripture:** Acts 10:25-44 NRSV

*(25)On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshiped him. (26)But Peter made him get up, saying, "Stand up; I am only a mortal." (27)And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled; (28)and he said to them, "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. (29)So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?" (30)Cornelius replied, "Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. (31)He said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. (32)Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' (33)Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say." (34)Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, (35)but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. (36)You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ--he is Lord of all. (37)That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: (38)how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. (39)We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; (40)but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, (41)not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. (42)He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. (43)All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (44)While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word.*

**Notes:**

1. Prevenient grace is the grace available ***before*** we know God.
   1. God is already at ***work***.
   2. God is ***wooing*** us before we reach that point of salvation.
2. Cornelius is at a ***crossroads***;
   1. The pull of prevenient grace is demonstrated through ***curiosity***;
   2. Prevenient grace is leading to ***recognition*** of God.
   3. Conviction is the part of grace that begins to ***align*** our ***lives*** to the kingdom of God
3. Prevenient grace works in ***Two*** ways
   1. Prevenient grace works in the life of the one being ***drawn*** to God.
   2. Prevenient grace works in the life of the person being ***commissioned*** to go.
   3. Each of us must accept our ***role*** in the grace that is reaching out to the lost;
4. Each one of us can ***celebrate*** what takes place in the life of a new believer.
   1. ***Celebrate*** when you see the hand of God working in the lives of those around us.
   2. We too will ***experience*** the prevenient grace of God;
   3. We are the ***hands*** and ***feet*** of Jesus;

**Script:**

Last week I started this series on Grace, and I said that if not for the Grace of God, I would never be where I am right now. It was the grace of Jesus to allow himself to crucified, a sacrifice for humanities sin; that allowed me to come back into a relationship with God. It was Jesus’ resurrection that conquered sin and death and made possible the salvation of each member of the human society. I, realizing my sin, asked the Lord to forgive me, and he did. I asked the Lord to enter my life and change me from the sinful being that I was and into a new creation that he wants me to be. And he did and he still does. For each day, as I strive to live under the direction of Jesus, I find myself becoming more and more like Him. And, I thank Him for his amazing, prevenient grace.

We all have stories of prevenient grace, for me I can tell you of the trips heading to California University and the breakdowns and close calls that I encountered; moments where God proved to me that he was with me. It was God’s prevenient grace that protected me and also introduced me to a God who truly loved me for who I was.

You see God is already at work in this world, orchestrating events to bring people to a place where they will not only be faced with the opportunity to ask Jesus to be Lord of their life, but also to lead them into the church. God was already at work in your life before you ever realized who He is and what He wanted from you, your love and obedience.

Today in our passage we find a story from Acts that shows us that even in the lives of his disciples he was working ahead to create opportunities to See God’s hand at work and for them to join in the ministry of God’s kingdom. Stand with me and join in the reading of

*Acts 10:25-44 NRSV* *(25)On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshiped him. (26)But Peter made him get up, saying, "Stand up; I am only a mortal." (27)And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled; (28)and he said to them, "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. (29)So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?" (30)Cornelius replied, "Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. (31)He said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. (32)Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' (33)Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say." (34)Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, (35)but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. (36)You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ--he is Lord of all. (37)That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: (38)how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. (39)We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; (40)but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, (41)not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. (42)He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. (43)All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (44)While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word.*

This story is just a portion of a greater story. This is the story of God’s grace, of God’s prevenient grace. We hear this term called prevenient grace and we wonder, what exactly is prevenient grace. We know from last week that grace is God’s unmerited favor; God’s loving response to an undeserving humanity, at no cost to those who receive it. It is a gift. And we also said last week we are all on a journey of grace. But this journey grace begins long before we ever realize it. Prevenient grace is the grace of God available to us before we ever realize who He is; it is the grace that entices us to seek something more in our life, to seek something greater; the grace that leads us to a point where we discover his presence and the opportunity we have to join him and restore a relationship with him.

Before we ever had that moment where we understand who Jesus is, God is already at work arranging encounters and events that will not only introduce us to who He is but also invite us to join him. Each of us have a different story; but in many ways it is the same. We live our life according to our means and desires. We experience an emptiness that something is missing, so we begin to search for something more. Soon, we encounter God and we begin to draw closer to see what He is all about, we investigate and gather evidence until we are able to make a decision.

God is wooing us even before we reach that point of salvation. We do not wake up one morning and say, I guess today I will ask Jesus into my heart; but God has been creating a desire in our hearts before we even knew who God is. In other words, we many times talk about leading people to Christ; however, Jesus is already there. We are merely helping to reveal Christ’s presence in their life. Our acts of discipleship are a big part of this. But prevenient grace is there before we even enter the picture.

In our story today a centurion named Cornelius has a vision. It states in the passage that Cornelius was an Italian centurion, which means that he most likely commanded about 100 men and they were part of a cohort of about 100 archers. It goes on to say that Cornelius was devout, that he feared as well as prayed to God, and that he gave offerings to the poor. Cornelius has already began to show interest in this God of the Jews. It doesn’t tell us why or how, just that he did.

In Cornelius’ vision he is told to send for Peter. Cornelius is at a crossroads; will he believe what the angel in the vision tells him or will he ignore it. That’s the thing about crossroads, crossroads are unique places in our lives where we find the opportunity to decide to go one way or the other, we must make a decision, and that is what Cornelius must do as well. In this particular instance, Cornelius is in a unique place being setup for grace to have its way with him.

In curiosity he obeys and sends two of his slaves along with one soldier to where the Angel in his vision says that Peter is staying. Why did Cornelius obey, because he wanted to see where it led. You see, anyone who begins to turn toward God is already under the allure of grace. Take Moses at the burning bush, he was drawn to it and could not turn away from it. Likewise, here for Cornelius. The pull of prevenient grace is often demonstrated by us through our curiosity; people show up in places where they normally wouldn’t be; they ask questions that don’t seem to make sense; they hang out longer than most, perhaps in hopes of striking up a conversation; they seem hungry for something, but do not know what it may be. But the beauty of prevenient grace is that God is already doing it.

Now we need to understand that prevenient grace is intentionally leading to recognition of God and his hand at work in your life; as well as, a decision to follow Him or resist him. Cornelius’s life would have constantly bumped up against the lives of God’s people. He was highly esteemed among the Jews, so he was not a foreigner to people of faith. You may also note that when prevenient grace led him to a revelatory moment, a time to decide, his first act of obedience was to seek the companionship of Peter, a Jewish Christian he’d never met.

Finally Cornelius experienced conviction. Conviction is the grace that begins to align our lives to the kingdom of God before we’ve made that kingdom our home. This is why discipleship is so important. Discipleship doesn’t begin at the point of conversion. Discipleship happens all along the journey of grace, nurturing, fostering, and fueling the work that God is already up to in a person’s life.

Prevenient grace works in two ways. First it works in the life of the one being drawn to God. But it also works through the person who is being called and commissioned to go and stand beside the one who is searching, pointing to the way, the truth and the life; remember last week when we talked about the come and go portion of grace.

In our story today we find Peter, who had a vision of his own telling him that what God has created should not be looked down upon as unclean or dirty; this includes the things we are able to eat as well as the people we are called to help lead to Christ. Each of us must accept our role in the grace that is reaching out to the lost; each of us has a role in the salvation of the lost.

Peter not only was to accept the invitation, but he also shared with Cornelius and his entire household and those who were there about the saving grace of Jesus Christ. And, in Peter’s obedience we find him pointing to Jesus Christ and it sounds like many, if not all who were present received Jesus as their savior, and all who were there, were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Each one of us can celebrate what takes place in the life of a new believer. We can celebrate what takes place in the life of Cornelius, as well as his family and friends lives. You can celebrate when you see the hand of God working in the lives of those around us. When you see people at the crossroads, you can celebrate. When you see people investigating and showing signs of curiosity, you can celebrate. When you see persons seeking companionship with members of the faith, when they seek companionship with us, you can celebrate. You can also celebrate when you see them under conviction, struggling with a situation in which God has control; while we know that they are in a difficult place we can celebrate because we know the Lord is at work in their life.

Let us not forget that we too will experience the prevenient grace of God; as he guides us to people in which we can assist them in finding their way to God, assisting them in answering the questions that they are curious to understand, we will experience the prevenient grace of God, guiding us to pray with people, pray for people, help people, and most of all be an example of God’s love to people.

Let us not forget that we are the hands and feet of Jesus; we are his church, and we are his people.