

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

2<sup>nd</sup> July 2023

**Matthew 10:40-42**

**AMBASSADORS OF GRACE**

In the international world which we live in, we are all very familiar with ‘Ambassadors’ and the role they play. Even back in the day when technology didn’t make travel and interaction between nations what it is now Ambassadors were still important, but they probably have much more of an ‘instant’ role now. We know that an ambassador is the official representative of a nation, and that to receive the Ambassador is generally seen as receiving the leader of that nation themselves. The Ambassador both takes messages from their own government to their host country, and from their host country back again. We might often hear or think about them because they are there to support we normal people if we are arrested overseas, or caught up in a natural disaster, conflict, or other trouble; they are a part of how our government helps us when we are in another country. On their side of things, they have diplomatic immunity, giving them the protection of their own government and its rights and privileges even when they are overseas. An ambassador is someone who has a role to play in representing those who have sent them, as both a messenger and a protector, and in turn also has privileges and rights because of what they have been called to do.

It is this picture of ambassadorship which may well come into our minds when we look at these words Jesus shares here with His disciples: ‘Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me. And anyone who welcomes me also welcomes the one who sent me’ (v. 40). What we are given both in these words of Jesus and those which follow, is a picture of the role of those disciples and others who were first sent out by Jesus. Like our ambassadors of today, they were sent as representatives to take out a message, and to show the love and care of the One who was sending them. A reward is also promised to those who receive them and their message. Jesus lays down here what His followers will receive, but also what they are called to do.

But as we look at it and apply it to our own world and our own lives, we can perhaps see ourselves as being not just Ambassadors of Jesus, but to talk about what we are really called to do,

as being Ambassadors of Grace. Like all good analogies this one also has its limits, because what we are talking about here is not just fulfilling the role of being an ambassador, but actually taking on a whole new core identity. As Jesus talks in this reading about how we welcome, treat, and help all people, and what we receive ourselves as we do this, it is the picture of Grace which comes through here. Grace is what we receive, what we live in, what we share.

What is 'Grace'? How do you define it? It is such a wide-ranging word, isn't it, that has so many applications and uses, and therefore definitions. In talking about it in respect of God and us, we might say that it is a free gift given in love; the gift of God's forgiveness and acceptance which relies in no way on who we are or what we do, but is freely given for us all to simply receive. And again, what Jesus tells His followers here, is that Grace is what we receive, what we live in, what we share.

A month ago, I attended the LCA-QD ministry summit up at Rochedale, which had the theme of 'Grace' (very common with Lutheran conferences!). One of the key speakers there, Dr. Mark Worthing, who is the Lutheran Pastor at Port Macquarie in NSW, gave two talks which really went into the application of living out grace in our lives, and he said some things which stuck with me and which I thought of while I was studying this reading this week. I do want to go into this more with you more as something which might give us some guidance and direction as a community here at St. Andrews, but for now I will just go through it briefly.

As Ambassadors of Grace, we show grace out in what do both as individuals and together, in this case as a congregation. The experience of grace changes us; if we know God's grace in our lives there is no way we cannot be changed! And we become, as Ambassadors, part of taking this news of the life, death, and life of Jesus out so it can continue to transform people and our world.

When we come together as Church, as God calls us to do, as all of these ambassadors gathered together, we now form a Grace-filled community. Mark laid down some great points about what this community looks like. A Grace-filled community is a:

1. Thankful Community. Everything good thing we receive and experience we see as coming from God, the big blessings and the small, and we give thanks to Him for that.

2. Welcoming Community – “we welcome and include ‘outsiders’. Accepting the other is easy until the other shows up in our midst.” We are conscious of our role as Ambassadors to show others by our words and actions that God accepts and is there for everyone.

3. Community not ruled by law. Rules and laws are good and needed for the sake of good order and of protecting people, but it is love which ultimately directs and determines what we do.

4. Community at Peace with God’s Plan for its future. It is right and natural that we get concerned when things aren’t ‘the way they used to be’, or ‘how we want them to be’. But in looking at both where we are and where we want to be as a Christian community, in prayer and listening to God we open ourselves up for where He is taking us.

5. Not a Program-driven community. Programs, activities, groups, etc are great, but they are not the end in themselves. Each thing we do is held up against the test of, ‘how is God’s grace being known, lived, and shared here?’

6. Loving Community. God’s love comes out in all we do. It is at the beginning, the middle, and the end of everything. Nothing trumps, is more important, than making sure God’s love comes through.

7. Community that does life together. We make Grace real by coming together in worship, but also sharing meals, helping people out, and enjoying the ‘normal’ as well as ‘churchy’ things together.

8. Community continually being surprised by Grace. We see what God does in and among us by His Grace, and we are excited by it. God’s grace is not just something we talk about, but something we know and experience in our lives,

9. Forgiving community. In any community of people hurts will be caused both knowingly and unknowingly. We receive God’s grace, there is no way we could have a relationship with Him without Him showing us forgiveness. Our call, as we are sent out, is to show what this means in how we now share this forgiveness both within our community and with others.

10. Community in which Grace is being proclaimed. If Grace is transforming our lives and our communities, we are going to proclaim it. There are numerous occasions in the Gospels when

Jesus showed Grace to people by forgiving them or through His miracles, and they went out and told everyone about that! If Grace is changing our lives, we have to share it.

As I said before, all good analogies have their limitations, and another for this one here is that there is always only one ambassador representing their nation in a foreign land, while as Ambassadors of Grace we come together to know, live, and share the news of this grace out with the world. We know we don't do these perfectly. We may see that while we show most of these things some of time, showing all of them all of the time will always be a work in progress for us.

Jesus sent both the disciples back then, and us today, out to share God's grace with everyone, because knowing God's forgiveness, God's love, God's care, is life changing both for each person and for the world. As Ambassadors of Grace, taking this message out, showing this love and forgiveness, being God's hands of love and care in the world, is what we are called to now do, both individually and together. God's grace shown to us in Jesus; receive it, live in it, share it. Amen.

#### **FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION**

- How do you define 'Grace'? In what ways do you experience God's grace in your life?
- As a disciple, an 'Ambassador of Grace', how is God calling you to take His grace out to others? What situations has He put you in so you can help others to know God's grace in their lives?
- Look at the 10 aspects of a 'Grace-filled Community' which are talked about above. Think about them in relation to a Christian community you are part of. Which ones do you think your community does well? Which do you believe it could do better? As someone who is a part of that community, what roles are you called to in order to help that community to be truly one which shows God's grace to everyone?

Pray: thank God for the gifts of love and forgiveness He freely shows to us by His grace. Ask Him to both be authentic Ambassadors of Grace in our lives, and to also help to Christian communities we are a part of to truly show His grace to others.

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