

9.11.2022 Pentecost 14

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Exodus 32:7-14; Psalm 51:1-10; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-10

“God’s grace overflows”

Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

God’s grace overflows at St. Mark’s. We are indeed blessed as a congregation. St. Mark’s has so many ministry opportunities that it is hard to keep track of them all. That’s what happens when God blesses our ministries; we have to work hard to keep up with the movement of the Holy Spirit. God’s grace is overflowing at St. Mark’s!

Today is “God’s Work Our Hands” Sunday, and we have many opportunities to serve our church and our community. I hope you will be able to be involved in some way after worship today, because together we are the body of Christ at St. Mark’s. I also want to thank those who have made lunch for our volunteers today.

Let me take a few moments to highlight some, but not all, of what is going on in September and October alone at St. Mark’s. Today, worship is accompanied by the festive trumpet of Gabriel Slesinger, and next Sunday, September 18th, Philip Brindise, also a CSO member will accompany worship with the sublime sounds of the French horn. On Saturday, September 24th, St. Mark’s will be included in the Charlotte Museum of History’s annual 2022 mid-century modern architectural tour, titled “Mad about Modern.” It is an opportunity to open our church and welcome many who may never have experienced this marvelous sacred space. On Sunday, September 25th, worship will be accompanied by a guest saxophonist, Eric Hillestad, and on the evening of the 25th, our *Vespers at St. Mark’s* series will host the Charlotte Brass Ensemble’s “Bach to Big Band” program.

Looking into October, on the evening of October 9th, *Vespers at St. Mark’s* returns with a trumpet and organ recital featuring Gabriel Slesinger, and on October 21st, the Baroque music ensemble, *Carolina Pro Musica*, will perform music by Bach and Telemann. On October 30th, Reformation Sunday, we celebrate the birth of the Lutheran church with the good news of “justification by grace through faith,” accompanied by organ, brass, timpani and choir. These are just some of the exciting programming events over the next two months helping us reach out to welcome ever wider circles of friends into our church, and helping us partner with groups that share our love of music, service and mission.

In addition, during September and October, St. Marks’s Men’s Group is volunteering at Ronald McDonald House and participating in the City of Charlotte’s “Adopt a Road” program. St. Mark’s

Men's Group has adopted a one mile stretch of Scott and Kenilworth Avenues. In addition, St. Mark's Social Ministry is helping support Pat's Place, a child advocacy center for children who have suffered trauma and abuse. Every week, St. Mark's own Soup Kitchen Ministry continues to search out the hungry and homeless offering meals and hope. Each week over 100 people meet in three AA groups at St. Mark's, offering hope and new life to many. St. Mark's Family Ministry, ably led by Liz Boldman, also continues to lead and develop our multi-faceted ministry toward children, youth and families. Like Jesus' parable today about searching and sweeping, St. Mark's is searching and sweeping our community seeking opportunities for partnerships with people and organizations so that all people might know that God's grace overflows in this place.

I have taken time to mention all of these things on our church calendar because this is how a church offers God's love by making and calling friends together to rejoice over God's amazing grace. All of these events and partnerships are evidence that God's grace overflows at St. Mark's as we seek to make the joy of God's grace known in Charlotte.

In the reading from 1 Timothy, Paul wrote, "*the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*" When the Holy Spirit is alive among us, we will always need to work to keep up with all of the new opportunities the Holy Spirit offers to us. Like Paul's experience, God's grace is overflowing at St. Mark's.

And yet people are funny. We all do it. We can have both hands full of the grace and love of Christ, and yet we still grumble. We don't like this or that; we don't have this or that; something doesn't suit our taste. A church can also be prone to Jesus's own experience in the gospel reading for today. The Pharisees and scribes had the living presence of Jesus with them, and rather than feeling the movement of the Holy Spirit among them, they grumbled. They said, "*This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.*" They didn't like it that Jesus was shaking things up. Jesus was doing ministry, welcoming the poor, the hungry, the sinful, the outcast, the sick. Jesus declared that in him the kingdom of heaven had drawn near, and yet, they grumbled. They complained. They could have rallied around Jesus, saying "'Hosanna!' God is with us in this place!" But they did not; they grumbled. Perhaps they were afraid of losing their own religious authority as leaders; perhaps they were afraid of change; or perhaps they didn't recognize the Holy Spirit moving among them.

As a church, we are called to imitate Jesus. A church is a center of God's mission, radiating love both inward and outward. In a church we experience grace that overflows, forgiving and healing us over and over again. We experience grace that grasps us, moving us to open ourselves to welcome

others, moving us to seek the lost, give comfort to the forgotten, to sweep and search out opportunities of grace that God gives us for mission, helping the kingdom grow in this place.

Paul spoke directly about this in today's reading: *"I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he considered me faithful and appointed me to his service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence...the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."* God's grace overflows, strengthening us, like Paul, for mission in this world. God's grace overflows so that all people of every nation, every ethnicity, every gender and identity are welcomed into God's house. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, searches us out, forgiving and welcoming us so that we can search out and welcome others into our church.

A church is place that offers Jesus, who is life and mercy, grace and forgiveness. Paul wrote that he received mercy from Jesus, so that in him – through him – Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience toward others so they might also believe in eternal life. As Christians, we ask for forgiveness, we forgive and model God's grace. So, we do not grumble; rather, we open our church to the community for worship, service and fellowship so that God's grace and mercy might continue to overflow in this place. We search out partnerships in our community trusting that God's grace overflows and that Jesus will display himself in and through our ministries of forgiveness, hope and love.

This is who God is. Like Paul, Jesus Christ has reached out to you. Jesus Christ has strengthened you and appointed you to his service. You have received mercy and forgiveness so that *in you – and through you* – Jesus Christ might display patience, love and mercy to others.

God's grace overflows at St. Marks. So, we do not grumble; rather, we light a lamp and work hard, sweeping and searching out God's opportunities for grace. We set tables for the hungry, we welcome the outcast, we offer hope to the sinful, we care for the sick, and we search out new partnerships with others – all to make known the love of Jesus in this place.

Jesus Christ has strengthened you, so that in you, God's grace might continue to overflow at St. Mark's! Amen.