Grace for all our wounds

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Date: 05 October 2025

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[0:00] Well, I think the encouragement goes two ways. We've been very encouraged to be here.! We're so thankful to be able to worship with you this morning. And you may not know this, but we pray for the ministry of this church back home at Grace and Peace pretty regularly.

In fact, we walked in and immediately we recognized this room from the Knowlton's newsletters. And so we're thankful for the privilege to be able to be here with you.
Last night with the international dinner was an amazing encouragement. We were able to hear fantastic music last night as well, a piece from Bach.
It was a delight. And so I'm going to read from Acts 2 in just a moment, Acts 2, 36 through 47. But before I do, I mean, it's so good to be here in a beautiful city like this.
You know, I'm a Presbyterian minister. I've been a Presbyterian minister for 17 years. We're a Presbyterian church, which means that we have a – we're indebted to the churches here in this country.
[1:07] And I don't know – hopefully you hear this when Americans come, especially from Presbyterian churches. But it bears – it's worth repeating that we're thankful for the ties that bind us, not just historically, but we truly are by the Holy Spirit family.

We're going to read about the Spirit's work here in Acts 2, verses 36 through 47. And then I will pray. This is the Apostle Peter speaking at Pentecost.
Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this. God has made this Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Messiah.
When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, Brothers, what shall we do? And Peter replied, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins.
And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, all whom the Lord our God will call.
[2:18] With many other words, he warned them and he pleaded with them, Save yourselves from this corrupt generation. And those who accepted his message were baptized, and about 3,000 were added to their number that day.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. And everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.
All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.
Let's pray and ask God's help. Father, we thank you that you have preserved your word for us for these thousands of years. And we thank you that they are not mere words, they are your very words.
[3:29] And we ask, Holy Spirit, that you would breathe life into them. And that you would convict us where we need to be convicted. That you would comfort us where we need to be comforted.

That you would dig out for us ears to hear and give us eyes to see the crucified and risen Christ. We pray this in his name. Amen. One of the things that you're struck by when you visit a new town, a new country immediately is that you are not certain at any moment where anything is, where you're going.

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We're glued to our phones, those of us who have service, trying to figure out where are we going. And it occurs to me, we long for certainty, don't we? Not just for where we're going, where we are. We long for certainty relationally. We long for certainty for the future. We long for certainty in so many ways. And it is, it's elusive.
Ever elusive. We're not certain of many things, are we? And in this passage, when Peter is speaking at Pentecost, this great, famous sermon, early sermon of the Christian church, Peter tells his audience that there is something that they can be certain of, though it goes through great grief.
[4:52] And he wants them to know that there is certainty in their grief so that he might give them a certainty, something they don't even know to look for. There's a certainty in their grief when he says, know for certain that Jesus is God's anointed.

He is his Lord and Christ, and you killed him. You murdered him. He gives them this certainty that pierces their heart so that they might have another certainty that is rooted in the grace of God that is greater, more powerful, more powerful, more stronger than their sin.
And so that's what I want to talk about this morning, that there is an amazing scene here where the apostle Peter is been, he's preaching with power. The Holy Spirit falls on God's people, and he wants them to know with certainty that they're sinners before God so that they might have certainty in the grace of God.
The Spirit who changes who we are changes our relationship with Jesus. And if we're going to hear anything this morning, it is that Christianity isn't just about what we do.
It's not merely what we believe. But it is an experience that God has given us his Spirit, changes who we are, that we might have a new relationship with God's Lord and Christ.
[6:23] This is incredible news for us. It was incredible news for the original audience, for Peter. And here's what Peter says. He says, even though Jesus' crucifixion was part of God's plan, your part in it is devastating.

God is not surprised by what has happened. God has orchestrated everything, and yet the part that you played in it when you murdered Jesus is devastating.
He says in verse 36, Therefore let all Israel be assured of this. God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.
Know for certain that the embodiment of righteousness and perfection, the embodiment of God's love, walked in your presence.
And you didn't recognize the embodiment of righteousness and perfection when he walked in your presence and when he spoke and you rejected him. What do you do when you realize you've been wrong on this kind of level?
[7:35] For those of us who had the privilege of hearing, you know, a piece of Bach last night, imagine sort of walking into a room where that is happening and saying, I'd rather have a conversation right now.

Who wants to play a game? Imagine hearing that and not being struck with, we need to be quiet and we need to soak this in and appreciate what this is.
Some of us might even be moved to tears by the majesty of what we heard. Imagine hearing it and saying, there's nothing memorable about this at all.
As tragic as this response would be, it pales in comparison to the human response of seeing righteousness and perfection and love embodied and rejecting him.
How could this have happened? You know, this doesn't happen in a vacuum. And sometimes I think it's easy for some of us to think, had I been there, I would have been different. We would not have been different.
[8:38] You know, the Bible famously says that all of creation proclaims the glory of God. Even blustery days like we've had proclaim the glory of God, the power of God.

Blue skies proclaim the glory of God. Psalm 19 says, day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge that there is something of our God that we can know.
There is something of his glory we can be certain of. When we look out at this world that he has spoken into existence, it proclaims his glory.
But because you and I have fallen short of this glory, God's word to us in creation doesn't merely speak glory, it also proclaims to us that we are accountable to the God who has made us.
Paul tells us in Romans 1, he says, for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

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[9:50] And so when we look out, you know, at God's creation, we, our group, we hiked up Arthur's seat, and we got to see a beautiful picture of your city.

When you look out and you see, from a higher vantage point, you get to see God's creation and what we have done in it, we get to remind ourselves like how small we are.
We feel it, don't we? But sometimes with that feeling of our finitude, there's a haunting feeling that comes with that. Sometimes we feel it when we put our heads on our pillow at night, and we feel deep in our bones, we are in need of grace.
There is something that is wrong with us, and God intends to meet us with every need with his grace. But my point is, if we suppress this truth in unrighteousness when God speaks to us in creation, as all humans do, the logical conclusion of that is that we would suppress and reject God's embodied word when he comes and he walks in our midst.
And so all of us are more in common, have more in common with those who rejected Jesus than we would like to admit. What happens when you realize that you've been wrong to this degree?
[11:12] You see, what Peter is saying is rejecting Jesus is more significant than we think that it is, and it's more violent than we think it is as well. And so often, when we're confronted with our sin, we justify it to ourselves, don't we?

Well, no, no, you misunderstood me. That's not what I meant. You misheard me. That's not what I meant. The problem here is with you. It's not with what I have done.
Or you don't know what they did to me first, and so of course I would respond this way. We justify our sin. But not here. Peter's original audience, they cannot justify themselves.
The evidence is irrefutable. Instead, we read that they were cut to the heart. When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, Brothers, what shall we do?
There's a question for us reading this text today. How do we know if the Holy Spirit is at work in our life? How do we know if he is present in our life?
[12:28] And one sign, there are many, one sign is that our sin grieves us. That we aren't just grieved by the sins of others.

That we realize the problem isn't just out there, but it's in here. That when we are confronted again by the Spirit's conviction, there is a grief that accompanies it.
You know, this grief isn't always felt with the same intensity. We have seasons of winter and spring in our own hearts. But a common Christian experience is that we feel a grief when confronted with our sin.
There are two different kinds of grief. Paul says in 2 Corinthians, there is a godly grief and a worldly grief.
He says godly grief leads to eternal life. Worldly grief leads to death. What's the difference? I'll share two examples from my life.
[13:34] Both are embarrassing. From a previous season of my life, it was not uncommon in my late teens, early 20s, to overindulge with alcohol.

And there were two times where I really felt particularly grieved by my behavior. And once, before I was a Christian, before I had been converted, had a regenerate heart, I was at a party in college and had overindulged and proclaimed my love, basically, for this young woman who was there in front of others very loudly and obnoxiously.
It was unacceptable. And I woke up the next morning utterly grieved by my behavior. It had nothing to do with the sin against a holy God. It had everything to do with I've ruined my reputation.
I've embarrassed myself. I've made a fool of myself. I was grieved by how I had acted, but it had nothing to do with sin or a holy God. And then a few years later, as a Christian, a similar experience happened.
I overindulged, and this was on purpose, and I woke up the next morning deeply grieved, but it was a very different sort of grief, though outwardly it looked the exact same. How could I have done this against a holy God?
[15:00] And I was grieved by those that I had been around. I have not modeled that the grace of Jesus is powerful, and that following Him is worth our lives.

I've sinned against God in this way, and I am grieved. And so outwardly, you have two very similar expressions, though inwardly a very different matter is happening altogether.

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The common Christian experience is to feel grief over our sin, but that grief stems from primarily sinning against a holy God who has been kind to us in sending His Messiah, Jesus.
And that's what's happening in this passage. They're grieved. And they're wondering, what do we do, Peter, with our sin against this Jesus?
What do we do? We have murdered the one who is the embodiment of righteousness and holiness and perfection. What do we do with that? And Peter says, turn to the one you have sinned against.
[16:10] It's utterly counterintuitive. How do we flee from our guilt? You have to turn to the one you've sinned against. You must lean on His promises. You must lean on the one that you have rejected, for He is gracious to sinners.

And see, the grief that we find in Acts chapter 2, it leads to repentance. And the repentance that we find here is far more than just a mere outward change in behavior. More than changing their behavior, their relationship with Jesus has been fundamentally changed.
We are not rejecting Him. We're not suppressing what He has to say. We want to be identified with Him. We want to turn to Him and be marked by Him. Repentance in the Bible is a combination of three things.
We see this in our shorter catechism. It is marked by hatred of sin. But it is marked by an understanding, an acknowledgement, an apprehension of the love and the mercy of God in Jesus. Only then can we endeavor after new obedience. We must hate our sin, but that alone is not enough. we must see more than our hatred for sin.
[17:37] A reception of the mercy and the grace and the love of Jesus. And it is love and it is mercy from Jesus that transforms our hearts and changes our motivations far more powerfully, compellingly, than guilt alone.

And then we strive after new obedience. You know, Christians are forced regularly to face our own sinfulness.
It doesn't go away, unfortunately, when we become Christians, does it? The Holy Spirit continues to expose our hearts and our motivations that are contrary to His.
And the goal is never for us to see how badly we can feel over our sin as if that was the goal. Just understand how bad you are.
Just understand that you messed up again. Just understand that you're not who you were meant to be. That's not the goal. Repentance will always remain incomplete if the dominant word that we hear from God isn't grace and mercy.
[18:46] This is why Peter says in verse 38, repent and be baptized. Every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the Holy Spirit.

You have to know that the cleansing blood of Jesus symbolized in baptism, it washes you, it cleanses you, in such a way that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection no longer is merely a marker of our guilt.
It is a marker of our acceptance with God. True repentance can only be born out of God's grace. Otherwise, it is not repentance.
Conviction is a good thing, but it is meant to be temporary and it serves its purpose only in so far as it drives us back to the cross of Jesus. Conviction is a good thing so far as it drives us to the mercy and grace of Jesus.
And once it has done that, it has served its purpose. In verse 39, he says, For the promise is for you and your children, for all who are far off, whom the Lord, our God, will call.
[20:02] I won't belabor this point, but again, what we see, if this passage is the culmination of so many Old Testament promises that God will pour out his Holy Spirit on his people, we also see the fulfillment that God has been making promises ever since Abraham.

I will bless the world through you and your family. And here at Pentecost, they're seeing, Peter is saying, God is going to bless the world through you and your family as you receive this Holy Spirit and you go out in your lives carrying this promise with you.
And so he says, save yourself. My translation says from this crooked generation, what is this corrupt generation?
What does it mean? It means that the refuge offered to us in Jesus is as real for us and our families as the refuge that God offered Noah and his family in the ark.
That when we flee to Jesus, there is a rescue and a protection in a world that is corrupt and yet we are left in this world.

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[21:15] How does this work? What does this look like? We're rescued from a kingdom and rebellion against God and yet we get to remain to serve in this world.

You see, for the Christian, the Holy Spirit changes the way that we look at everything. It changes the way we look at our relationships. It changes the way that we look at our families, our work, everything.
Everything now is seen in light of Jesus and the healing that he brings. And so we see in verse 41, those who accepted his message were baptized and about 3,000 were added to their number that day.
their lives were changed and not just changed as individuals, they're brought into a community, the church, together.
The common Christian experience is a humbling one where we see our need for a savior and yet we also see that we cannot and must not go about life all on our own anymore.
[22:26] in God's kindness he has given us a community, his body, the church. And so we see this is why they devote themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to breaking of bread, and to prayer.

They commit themselves to immersing themselves in the good gifts that God has given us that show us what to do with our guilty consciences.
when our consciences are stung again, when we are pierced again and anew by the sin that we continue to see in our life, God has called a people to devote ourselves, to immerse ourselves in the ways that God has promised to meet us and shape our minds.
The apostles' teaching, of course, is the New Testament. We're given the scriptures to be reminded that it's not all law, do this and thou shalt not do this, but grace for those who cannot do this perfectly.
We're reminded again and again as we immerse ourselves in the scriptures together that God has done for us what we cannot do for ourselves. And we're called to immerse ourselves in prayer with God's people, to adore the God who has graciously forgiven us of our sins and we ask him to make us more like him.
[23:50] And we immerse ourselves in the breaking of bread, the Lord's Supper, where we get to see again and again that Jesus' body broken on a cross points to more than our guilt.

It does point to that. He must die for our sin. But it points to our forgiveness and the grace that we receive. And we cannot hear this message one time or two times or three times.
We have to hear it again and again and not just as individuals, as a body, as a church. All of this happens in Acts in the context of fellowship.
Here's the other thing I think that we might not notice immediately from this passage. It's easy, I think, sometimes to hear this and think, okay, here's what I've got to do.
I've got to read the scriptures and I've got to pray and I've got to take the Lord's Supper and, oh, I need to do that with people and not see that these are gifts from God. And it's not just a gift, it's not just a checklist, it's a gift because there is more pain in this life than just the conviction of sin, isn't there?
[25:06] I mean, we feel pain and misery all the time and some of that is a hardship that just comes with our work life. We go to work and things don't work the way that we think they should.

We're not treated as fairly as we want and there is a pain that is there. Or relationally, there is pain that the relationships that should be the easiest for us sometimes feel like they're the hardest. Maybe you've asked for the good gift of children in your life and then they come and you're not sure how to raise them. Am I messing them up? Life is hard. And we are people filled with anxiety and at times depression.
Life in this fallen world is hard. And then there are medical diagnoses where we get the devastating news that it's cancer or Alzheimer's or somebody you know and love is taken from you too early and they pass away from this life.
Life in this fallen world is hard. God. And when we read that the early church had they shared their possessions together. It's more than possessions.
[26:20] They shared their lives together. And why? Because when you live life together sometimes people are up here. Life is going well and the paycheck is coming in and sometimes you live life down here and you go to a funeral again.

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and God has given us a people together saturated in this good news so that we have people to come alongside of us and say you cannot pray for yourself today but I can pray for you.
And you don't know how to pay for your bill this month but we can come alongside you. And then when you are in another place in life and that person is down well we have one another.
And so what God has given us in the church is not just a checklist of things that we're supposed to do. It is grace for all of our wounds and we need one another because none of us is ever able to face all of life at the same time.
We need help to rejoice and we need help to grieve. And we need help to come alongside one another when we need to bring a meal for somebody who doesn't have one or isn't in the situation or position to prepare it for themselves.
[27:36] God has given us a body to come alongside of us when we feel the wounds of life in a fallen world that might not flow directly from conviction of sin and yet it is still a mark of just life in a world that doesn't function the way that it is supposed to.

We ought not to fall into the trap that the early church was particularly better at this than we were. As if they were forgiven and all went well right after that.
Two chapters after this two church members are punished severely because they make a mockery of sharing life together. In 1 Corinthians Paul tells us that you Christians sometimes forget the rich are exploiting the poor.
We need the gospel again to remind us our sinfulness continues to run deep but God's grace triumphs over that and we need each other to embody that together to see that in one another.
It's a good gift for us and lastly and most briefly probably it's a good gift for the watching world.
When we live life together when the gospel meets us and transforms us as a body as individuals surely but also as a body what we find in this passage is that the watching world will they marvel.
[29:10] Verse 46 every day they the church continued to meet together in the temple courts they broke bread in their homes they ate together with glad and sincere hearts praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The gospel renews us to live the lives that we were created to live. It renews us and when we begin to live that life out together somebody will notice.
How did you get through that season? How did you pick yourself up? How did you put yourself through it? I didn't. I didn't. God was gracious to me.
He met me in my church community. And they might think that we are crazy for the things that we believe. But we might also find that they long for the community that we find when a community is being shaped by the love and mercy of Jesus.
because a community that is being shaped by the love and the mercy of Jesus finds itself becoming more merciful and loving itself. Meeting the needs of others.
[30:32] And the part of all of us that looks around and sees the glory of God in creation but then also feels like there's something wrong with me. I'm accountable to this God. that part of us is drawn powerfully to seeing the body of Christ living life together.

Why do people love like that? Well, Jesus has loved us. The mark of love, the mark of those who have received great love is that they become loving themselves.
And this is good news for us and it is good news for the world around us. Let's pray and ask God to help us live in light of that now.
Amen.

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