

SPOKANEWORD

June

2023



Spokane Friends

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Following the teachings of the Living Christ, we are an open, loving, and affirming community. We believe that God's Light is inherent within all people. There are no exceptions.

Sunday Schedule

Traditional worship in stillness
begins at 8:45 a.m. or
when first person sits down
Programmed worship 10:00 a.m.
In-Person and Via Zoom
See Website For Link

First Sunday of the Month
Potluck Meal at rise of worship

Third Sunday of the Month
Monthly Meeting for Business
begins at rise of worship

Grace with Sunglasses On

by Johan Maurer

[Editor's note: This sermon, condensed due to space considerations, was given to Spokane Friends on April 23, 2023.]

Good morning! Grace and peace to you from God, our gracious loving Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me start out with these two Bible passages out of the dozens I could have chosen:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God....Ephesians 2:8

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. 2 Peter 1:2-4

When I was in seminary, I had Tom Mullen as my preaching professor. He was an excellent speaker himself, so of course we students were all eager to do well in his course, and at the same time we knew we had a hard act to follow.

I think HE thought he was making it easier when he told us, "There is really only one truly Christian sermon theme, and that is 'grace' -- but that gives you enough material for a lifetime of messages." I suppose I should have been comforted by the idea that I really don't have to search for new topics every time I speak, but there really is a problem: thinking about "grace" is a little like looking directly at the sun. It seems much safer to put on sunglasses than to dare to look directly at God's unconditional love poured out on us.

When I was a pastor at Reedwood Friends Church in Portland, I sometimes gave children's messages, using my friends Garfield and Lamb Chop and Dima the Bear. In my storytelling world, Garfield and Lamb Chop are friends, and they were the main cast members of the stories I used to tell our kids at bedtime when they were young. Later I used some of these same stories for the kids at Reedwood. One story involved the lasagna restaurant that Garfield and Lamb Chop opened in Kokomo, Indiana. They needed a bank loan to finance this project. Their friend Dima the banker gave them the money they needed. Dima explained to them that if they couldn't make their loan payment on the day it was due, they had a 30-day period of grace, during which they could sell enough lasagna to make the payment. During those thirty days, they could focus their energy on making lasagna, not the debt. Dima was a good banker and a good friend, but he wasn't God. God has no time limit on grace.



Tom Mullen's students weren't the first to be dazzled by the theme of grace. Theologians of higher rank than Dima and Lamb Chop have been trying to divide it up into manageable size for millennia. To me, grace is God's unmerited loving power and care, that enables us to be in relationship with God and to act in the world on the basis of that power and that relationship. It is ours for the asking; there's nothing we have to do to earn or deserve it. It's so overwhelming, so total, that of course we humans had to figure out (continued on next page)

(continued from last page) how to manage such generosity intellectually. Some early theologians thought that although grace was supposedly universal, we humans are so rotten that God has to select a fixed number on whom to bestow mercy, and they would continue to need grace to maintain the relationship. Others, particularly in the Eastern church, protested that grace was unconditional, and we human beings, all of us, are always at liberty to choose to receive it. Eastern Orthodox Christians have their own ways of interpreting the word, and often it involves the idea that grace is the primordial, uncreated energies of God. When we receive grace, we are potentially participating as much in God's own nature as it is possible for a creature of God to do.

Listen again to Second Peter: "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature...." No wonder we need strong sunglasses to even think about what God offers us in grace!

Now, the church as human institution and as power structure might not want us ordinary people to have direct access to these promises without some kind of supervision. Somehow these incredible promises had to be communicated to people who were not yet aware of them, and church leaders were given the responsibility to communicate what God was promising. Paul starts out most of his New Testament letters with the words "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." And most of Paul's letters then end up greeting the various people he knows in those places he's writing to; these are the men and women who are actually proclaiming and showing grace in their house churches and communities.

The vocabulary of grace got more elaborate as time went on, and the church's intellectuals grappled with hard questions such as "Are we sinners capable of receiving grace unless God intervenes to open us up to it?" And "If such intervention is necessary, does it happen to everyone or just to some of us?" And "Does it depend on us, or does it depend on God's choice?" And the politically weighty question of "Who decides?" Who operates the gates of the church, signaling to us which of us are acceptable and which aren't?

Communication is always a challenge, and the early church often chose effective words and symbols with care and beauty, drawing on the resources of the Jewish communities that gave birth to Christianity. Passover, for example, helped shape the sacrament of communion, both being intended to convey God's promises to God's people. Later other sacraments were codified as the way grace is communicated to the people. Sacraments were supposedly the way that our souls and our affections are drawn into cooperation with God. And Quakers dare not look condescendingly on the outward sacraments if we have not ourselves found an equally effective way to be reminded of our need for grace and our standing invitation to open ourselves up to it.

Some theologians came to see the Bible as another vehicle of grace, but if so, can we church leaders risk letting ordinary people read the Bible for themselves, or is this channel of grace reserved for the leadership? For centuries, giving the wrong answer to this question could get you burned at the stake.

Then along came Quakers, who claimed to cherish the Scriptures equally with their contemporaries, but who didn't seem to require the traditional channels for conveying the grace promised in those Scriptures. As **William Penn** explained in his defense of Quakers against what he called the "perversions" charged against them:

Perversion 14: The Quakers deny the two great sacraments or ordinances of the Gospel, Baptism and the Supper.

Principle: Whatever is truly a Gospel ordinance, they desire to own and practice. . . [They acknowledge that] the practice of John's baptism and the Supper is to be found there [in the Scriptures]; but practice only is no institution, nor a sufficient reason for continuation. . . it is their belief that no figures or signs are perpetual or of institution under the Gospel administration, when Christ, Who is the Substance of them, is come.

When it comes to theology, we Quakers have another peculiarity. Historically, we haven't spent much time on trying to understand or describe the mysteries of faith, preferring to describe the practical outcomes of faith in the living of daily life. To put it another way, metaphysics isn't one of our strengths as a people. So, for example, here's William Penn again, from the same tract I just quoted from, treating the subject of the Trinity:

Perversion 9: The Quakers deny the Trinity.

Principle: Nothing less. They believe in the holy three, or Trinity of Father, Word, and Spirit, according to Scripture. And that these things are truly and properly one; of one *nature* as well as *will*. But they are tender of quitting Scripture terms and phrases for schoolmen's, such as distinct and separate Persons or substances are, from whence people are apt to entertain gross ideas and notions of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. And they judge that a curious inquiry into those high and divine revelations . . . tends little to godliness and less to peace,

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which should be the chief aim of true Christians. Speculative truths are, in their judgment, to be sparingly and tenderly declared, and never to be made the measure and condition of Christian communion. [Penn went on to write...] Men are too apt to let their heads outrun their hearts, and their notions exceed their obedience, and their passions support their conceits, instead of a daily cross, a constant watch, and a holy practice.

So, not surprisingly, we Friends have not prioritized describing exactly how grace is conveyed from God to us, and in what order, and under what conditions, but we love to see it in operation as people grow closer to God and to each other, and our lives reflect what we're learning daily about living with God at the center.

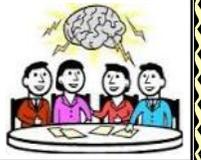
However (There always has to be a however!) ... If other Christians say that grace is conveyed through Word (with a capital W) and Sacrament, and we say, those are well and good but not necessary, because we have the substance, Christ, we better mind our manners. Those "Sacraments" so-called, have visibly been effective for many generations of dear people who were never abandoned by God, even if church authorities became over-controlling or, on the other hand, began phoning it in because it all became so routine. AND, also, do we in fact have the substance we claim to have? Do we in our daily lives know what it is to live with Jesus himself at the head of our meetings, and our yearly meetings, or are we too just as vulnerable as everyone else to falling in love with our own clichés and conceits?

The good news for this morning, and for all mornings, is that God's promises are true and unconditional, and we can claim and reclaim them at every moment. Every time I visit you, I get glimpses of that grace in action that even peering at each other through Zoom can't dim. As you ask for prayer, and pray for each other, I see grace in operation. I see grace in the fascinating material you put in your newsletters. I love how grace is reflected in the music that you choose for worship, because I know that making those choices is a talent I wish I had, but don't.

But maybe there's someone here this morning, or online, who's not feeling much grace at the moment. It happens. It's happened to me. I just have two points in conclusion: first, God is pouring it out on us now and always, whether or not we're in a place to be as aware as we'd like. And, second, sometimes we do need a channel for that grace to touch us. That's where the community comes in. Today I may feel lost and without a sense of grace, but you as a body are remembering God's promises on my behalf. Tomorrow, I might be far more ready to receive this reassurance, and carry it on your behalf. Together, step by step, sometimes in fits and starts, God's grace is helping us, just as Peter's letter promised, grow into the Divine nature.

Johan Maurer and his wife, Judy, are recorded ministers in Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting. He is also a member of Camas Friends Church as well as Moscow Meeting in Russia. Keep up with him via his weekly blog at blog.canyoubelieve.me

There was NO
MONTHLY MEETING
FOR BUSINESS during
May 2023.



Note to on-line readers:

Sometimes we print pictures that we have as hard copy, but not an on-line version. We cut them out and paste them in before making the Newsletter copies. Thus the on-line version does not include them and you see a blank space instead. Sorry.

This was a cartoon, with a man crossing out a line on a chart labeled "Wildlife in Danger; the Most Threatened Species." He says "That's one more creature we can remove from the endangered species list. It's become extinct."

2023 Legislative Successes: Outcomes of Our Advocacy



We highlight just a few bills that passed into law during the past State Legislative Session:

- *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women & People (MMIWP) Cold Case Unit (HB 1177 Rep. Lekanoff) creates a cold case investigations unit within the Office of the Attorney General.*
- *In the Capital Budget: \$400 million for the Housing Trust Fund to build and preserve permanently affordable homes, \$40 million for land acquisition to quickly acquire land for affordable housing to be built, \$14.5 million for shelter and housing for homeless youth and young adults, \$6 million for preservation and investments in manufactured housing communities, and \$60 million for infrastructure needed when building new affordable homes.*
- *Establishing Firearms-Related Safety Measures to Increase Public Safety (HB 1240 Rep. Peterson) prohibits the sale, manufacture, transport, and import of assault weapons in Washington*
- *.Ensuring Restoration of Salmon and Protection of Orcas (Budget) provides funding to move toward removal of lower Snake River dams, including \$500,000 for an irrigation availability plan for agricultural production.*

Quaker News

- ⇒ **Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends** will have it Annual Sessions June 23 - 25 at Western Oregon University in Monmouth, OR. The theme is “Hard-Earned Hope: Finding Our Way Together.”
- ⇒ **Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends** will hold its annual sessions at George Fox University on July 23-27, 2023.
- ⇒ **World Quaker Day** for 2023 is Sunday, Oct. 1. This is an annual event where we celebrate the diversity of Quakerism around the world and build connections to make our community stronger. This year’s theme is “Living the spirit of ubuntu: Responding with hope to God’s call to cherish creation -- and one another.”
- ⇒ **American Friends Service Committee** is advertising many jobs in various parts of the country, from volunteers to interns to top dogs. For more info, put “American Friends Service Committee jobs” in your search engine.
- ⇒ **FCNL** is advertising for an **IT Network Administrator, Social Media and Digital Communication Manager**, and a **Controller**. They also have many volunteer opportunity for young adults. More information is available at <https://www.fcnl.org/about/work-fcnl>
- ⇒ **Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends** is advertising 3 jobs, including two youth and family pastors, an office manager and a part time building manager. For more info, go to <https://nwfriends.org/job-openings/>

Financial Report May 2023

May Income :	\$4567.37
May Expenses:	\$3447.71
Difference	+ \$1199.66

G.S. Lewis compared the difference between theology and faith to the difference between maps and the sea coast.

--Carol Doran and Thomas Troeger

From the Office Mailbox . . .

Memorial Bulletin for her uncle, Ron Watson, from Lorraine Watson 4/4/2023

Ron Watson was an active member at Spokane Friends along with his wife Marlene. During the open sharing, Edith Pinto's daughter Shirley Brown Klever spoke about growing up at Spokane Friends and the impact Ron and Marlene had on her life as a young person. It is so true that the ministries of the church have far reaching effects. Thank you for your faithfulness. I pray love and blessings over you and often reflect on the years that we shared ministry together.

From Carolynne Myall and Sydney Chambers: 4/28/2023

As always, thank you for sharing your space. Thank you also for your flexibility in letting us change the time of silen meeting to 8:45 am. We are hoping this time will work out well, and not cause you inconvenience -- or any more inconvenience, anyway! Again, we appreciate your generosity to us. Warm Regards.

From Nancy and Jeremy Street 3/23/2023

Thank you for all the wonderful services provided by volunteers. And, thank you for all the cards and monthly news we receive. Blessings . . .

Caritas Needs This Week



Food:

Canned vegetables	Canned fruit
Pancake Mix	Syrup
Canned meals like Mac & Cheese and Spaghetti, Meatballs	
Soup: all kinds	Cereal

Necessities:

Laundry Detergent	Dish soap
Paper Towels	Kleenex
Shampoo	

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

- Driver on Wednesdays from 10:30 am to noon.
- Driver during summer plus September on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday from 8:30 to 10:30 am .

The ability to pick up the rescued food is key to our being able to help our clients.

Call 509-326-2249.