

“A Pattern of Grace” – Pr Jim Sprenkle – Thanksgiving Eve, November 24, 2021

- I. **Deuteronomy 8:1** – ¹ “The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers.
- II. **From the beginning, God has always taken care of humanity.**
 - a. All the way back to Adam and Eve, He set up a beautiful world and place to live – including food, water and shelter – all that we could need.
 - b. Even after sin had entered the world through Adam and Eve’s rebellion in the Garden, God still blessed and cared for our forefathers with a land of their own.
 - i. In Genesis 15, God tells Abraham that a holy land will be given to his offspring...which will be blessing for generations.
 - ii. Of course, many trials and tribulations followed after Abraham, which ended in slavery in Egypt... but Moses led God’s people out of bondage to the Promised Land.
 - c. I guess you could say that God has a pattern of grace by giving us a place of our own – a land which He wants us to have – to provide for us and bless us.
 - d. On this Thanksgiving Eve, we can look around as Christians and know that we still have a place, a land which provides for and blesses us.
 - i. We have a great nation that has a very high standard of living.
 1. We have a land to raise families, to dwell in relative safety, and to live life as God calls us to.
 2. I say it quite a lot, but America has so much more than the vast majority of other countries – from medical care to food and all kinds of products and ways to sustain us...
 - ii. And not only do we a land given by God, but we have a church home and the freedom to worship without fear of persecution – unlike so many other countries around the world.
- III. **Our Lutheran forefathers even experienced persecution.**
 - a. I read a great summary or history of the The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod by a Reverend Doctor Stephen Becker.
 - i. He explained that the Reformation began in Saxony, Germany when Martin Luther posted the Ninety-Five Theses on the church door in Wittenberg, Germany in 1517 (which many of us know)
 - ii. About 300 years later, the Lutherans in this area of Europe were impacted by persecution from the government...
 1. The central teachings and confessions of the Lutheran Church were – and still are – the way we interpret the Bible... The Book of Concord, which includes the Augsburg Confession...

2. However, the government wanted a one state church – and told the Lutherans and the Reformed (who, in America are modern day Presbyterians and Methodists among others) to just blend everything together.
- b. Rather than abandon the Lutheran Confessions and face criminal charges if they didn't go along with the plan, they decided to come to America.
 - i. In November of 1838, a group of about 1100 German immigrants set sail in five ships to stay faithful to their beliefs.
 - ii. Only 4 of the ships arrived, as one was lost at sea... and so 750 of them settled in January of 1839 in an area just south of St. Louis, Missouri – a place called Perry County
 - iii. That first winter was terrible, and it could have wiped everyone out if they hadn't received help from the locals.
- c. After 10 years or so, 14 congregations got together in Chicago and founded the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States (how would you like printing that on your church sign?)
 - i. The first president was C.F.W. Walther
 - ii. 100 years later, in 1947 the Synod name was changed to what we have today, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS)
- d. When you look back on our own LCMS history, it's also a time to give thanks and remember that God also delivered those first German immigrants to a land of promise and rich blessings.
- e. Regardless of whether His children are sinful or rebellious, which we all are sometimes, God still keeps on blessing us.

IV. **But then again, God is like that...**

- a. He is a God of grace with a plan for the redemption of all people – not just a select few.
- b. Showing His grace throughout history culminated in the greatest act of grace ever... the death of His Son, our Savior, on the cross.
 - i. When we talk about grace in the purest sense, it is Jesus giving up His life to pay for our sins... because He loves us.
 - ii. He gave up His life to redeem us, or buy us back, from sin, and death, and the devil.
 1. Though they have some power in our lives, they do not have the final word...
 - iii. And by this grace and our faith in Jesus, we can all be assured that we have a permanent home – a permanent holy land – that is beyond our earthly home.
 - iv. And that's what the Bible is all about – the events, the people and God's presence in bringing it all together for the purpose of rescuing us and giving us His gifts.

- c. In so many ways, we see God's wonderful pattern of grace in the past, and also in the present too.
 - d. I guess what I'm saying is that God's work and saving grace means something in our life today.
 - e. We might not always give thanks for it, but God is constantly working to take care of us, to give us peace in a world full of trouble – and especially peace in knowing that we have a God who never leaves us or forsakes us.
- V. **So, go all the way back to the beginning...**
- a. With Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden, the story began of God's redemptive work.
 - b. Continue with the story and we see the gift of the Promised Land to Abraham and his offspring... which ultimately came to the people after Moses.
 - i. This is God's protection and grace that made it happen...
 - c. Just like Martin Luther 1000's of years later was able to stand up against popes and kings and emperors to remain true to the Gospel... as God protected him from execution.
 - d. Even the Germans who fled their lands to come to America for the freedom to express their faith were led by God's hand is His grace and protection.
 - e. And when you stop to think about it, we sit here tonight worshipping on Thanksgiving Eve because of the long pattern of God's grace.
- VI. **All of us have a history and a story...**
- a. But when you get right down to it, God's grace is always there.
 - b. In whatever way you got here to worship, and no matter where you are – even if you are home watching from a screen – God brought you this far...
 - i. He reminds you of your Baptism when He called you His own child
 - ii. He strengthens your faith in His Holy Supper, by giving you a part of Himself each time we eat His body and drink His blood.
 - iii. He reminds you of His promises all throughout the Bible that He will be there to supply your needs, to forgive, and to be present always.
 - c. God has certainly shown us a pattern of grace – and it will never end...
 - d. Happy Thanksgiving, my friends and family of Ascension Lutheran Church.
 - i. You are living proof of our God's grace at work. Amen¹

¹ Based on sermon notes from Concordia Pulpit Resources, Rev. Stephen H. Becker, PhD, pastor