

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“God Gives Grace”
(Part I of “Awakened to Grace”)
May 24, 2026 (Pentecost)

Scripture

Psalm 32:1-2
Romans 5:1-5
Ephesians 2:8-10

Core Idea and purpose

Core theological ideas from earlier sermons in the series:

- None. This is the first sermon in a series

Core theological idea: Grace saves us from the guilt and power of sin

Challenge/purpose: To encourage people to have a deep yearning for God’s grace.

The Sermon

As a youngster, when I was about 10 years old, I became highly agitated whenever anyone implied that I needed help. I wanted everyone to know that I was smart and capable of doing just about anything on my own. Whenever my dad saw me trying to repair a mechanical device or follow complex directions that involved a variety of tools, he would walk up to me, observe the chaos around me and ask, “David, do you know what it is you are doing?” To which, I would gather up all my confidence and rudely exclaim, “Dad, I know what I’m doing! I don’t need any help from you or anyone else!” My dad would walk away, shaking his head. As I look back on those moments, I recognize my own ignorance and my dad’s wisdom.

We live in a society that teaches us the myth of the self-made man. We learn from a young age that we must become independent and pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. It’s all up to the individual. We must learn to do it on our own. Well, that’s a bunch of hogwash! Yes, it’s true. If you don’t work hard, you won’t be successful. If you want to be successful, you must put in the time. However, no one is successful in isolation. To think you can do it all on your own is just foolish arrogance. When I was 10 years old, I was foolish and arrogant because I thought I could do everything on my own. For a while, we may be able to survive on our own, but we will never thrive on our own. God created us to depend on each other – each of us contributing our unique gifts to the betterment of society. Most of all, God created us to be dependent on God.

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We are dependent upon God for our very existence and life. We depend on God for our food and hospitable environment. Perhaps even more significantly, we depend on God just to be decent people.

It is impossible for us to be decent & loving people without the presence of God. We have a sinful nature that causes us to be selfish – always wanting things our own way. We often hurt people when we don't get our way. We gossip, attack with hurtful words, and even use knives or guns to kill people. If you have a hard time accepting this reality, just watch CNN or Fox News. We know we shouldn't be this way, but we can't seem to help it.

Scripture describes this human predicament. In Jeremiah 13:23 it says, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.” Yes, we are accustomed to evil.

We often cover up our tendency to do evil with deceit. We lie to ourselves. Jeremiah 17:9 teaches, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” This strong tendency to lie to ourselves is called rationalization. The word 'rationalize' comes from two words: 'rational' and 'lies'. Put the two together and you have 'rationalize'. We tell ourselves intelligent sounding falsehoods to justify bad behavior. This is a hard truth that's not easy to hear. We're all guilty of lying to ourselves. For example, we often rationalize our gossip. I hear many people say, "I know this is gossip **but** you need to hear this." or "I know this is gossip **but** we need to pray about this." People who make these statements tell themselves that they desire good for the person being talked about but they just want to gossip. That little word 'but' is packed with meaning. Whenever we use that word, we probably shouldn't do what we're about to do.

So, here is the bottom line, we are doomed if left to be good on our own. BUT there is some good news – the best news in the world!! God doesn't expect us to be good on our own and never leaves us alone. God responds to our sinful nature with **grace**!! GLORY HALLELUIA!!

In Ephesians 2:8-10, Scripture tells us “For it is by **grace** you have been saved, through **faith**—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” To truly appreciate the goodness of this passage, we must understand the words **grace** and **faith**.

Faith is trusting Jesus as Savior & Lord. Right before I left for vacation, I touched upon **faith** when I preached about Jesus as our Lord. The following Sunday, Amy Russell also touched upon **faith** because she continued to speak about Jesus as

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Lord. So, my focus now is on **grace**. For the next three sermons, I will preach about receiving God’s **grace**. Today, we start by defining **grace**.

What is **grace**? It is God’s unconditional love that is made known to us by the Holy Spirit. Let me say this again: **Grace** is God’s unconditional love that is made known to us by the Holy Spirit.

This love is unconditional because we don’t deserve it. Due to our strong sinful inclination, none of us has ever lived a perfect life worthy of God’s love. God loves us simply because it’s God’s nature to do so. God literally is love. This type of unconditional love can change us if we receive it.

It is the Holy Spirit that makes us aware of God’s unconditional love. That’s why we are starting this series on **grace** on Pentecost Sunday. Pentecost is when the Holy Spirit descended upon the church to empower the church to be the hands, arms, legs, and mouthpiece for God. With Holy Spirit empowerment, we can love the unlovable, seek justice for poor, oppressed, & marginalized people and proclaim the Kingdom of God as a present reality. It is this same Holy Spirit who makes us aware of God’s unconditional love.

Romans 5:5 tells us about **grace**. It says, “...hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” Whenever you read this verse, think, “This is God’s grace – God’s unconditional love being made known to us by the Holy Spirit.”

Also look at the United Methodist logo, the cross and flames. It tells us about **grace**. The flames remind us of the Holy Spirit, going back to the Pentecost story in Acts 2. The cross reminds us of God’s unconditional love. The Holy Spirit and God’s unconditional love combines to give us **grace**.

Whenever you hear the word ‘**grace**’ think 1) God’s unconditional love and 2) The Holy Spirit.

Now that we’ve defined **grace** & **faith**, let’s re-read Ephesians 2:8-10 replacing the two words with their definitions. “For it is by **God’s unconditional love made known to us by the Holy Spirit** you have been saved, through **trust in Jesus** – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Now that we’ve defined **grace**, we must consider what **grace** does for us. It saves us from both the guilt and power of sin.

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Grace saves us from the guilt of sin by bringing us to the point of repentance and then offering us forgiveness.

Repentance is a sincere desire to change from a life of sin to a life characterized by holy love. At this point, many people try to change themselves only to realize they can't do it. They come to understand that the only thing they can do is receive God's forgiveness and surrender to God's loving authority.

God's act of forgiving a repentant sinner is called justifying **grace**. When a person receives this **grace** and is justified, that person is no longer condemned because God has forgiven him/her. A right relationship with God is restored. This is how **grace** saves us from the guilt of sin. At this point the person is born again or a new creation. (Both terms refer to the same thing.)

Once we are freed from the guilt of sin, **grace** begins the process of freeing us from the power of sin. As a 'born again' person walks in a relationship with the Father through faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit works to change that person's heart to make him/her more holy and loving like Christ. This process of changing a person to make him/her more holy and loving like Christ is called sanctifying **grace**. As we strengthen our relationship with God through worship, prayer, Bible studies, meditation, fasting and serving others, we open our hearts to God's sanctifying **grace**. We gain more dominance over our sinful nature and find ourselves becoming the people God created us to be. We find ourselves sinning less because it becomes less natural for us to do so. Our default reaction in any given situation becomes one of love rather than sin. In this way, **grace** frees us from the power of sin.

Now, sit back and enjoy a presentation by the Ignite Creative Arts ministry as they give us a performative look at how God's **grace** saves us from sin.

[Pastor leaves and the Ignite Creative Arts Ministry performers act out a skit. When the skit is over, the pastor returns]

One last thing about **grace**, God offers it to everyone, and each person can either accept it or reject it. God will not force Himself on anyone because He wants a genuine love relationship with each of us. It's not a loving relationship if God forces us to say yes to His offer of grace.

Inside your bulletin is a piece of paper. Write down any sinful attitude or desire that may have some control over your heart. A sinful attitude or desire is anything that is keeping you from fully loving God, neighbor, and yourself. What you write will remain confidential. No one will read any of it. Fold the paper, walk to the

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front of the sanctuary and place it at the foot of the cross. Give it over to Jesus so God's **grace** can give you dominion over these sinful desires or attitude.

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Outline

I. Our need for each other

A. As a youngster, when I was about 10 years old, I became highly agitated whenever anyone implied that I needed help.

- I wanted everyone to know that I was smart and capable of doing just about anything on my own.
- Whenever my dad saw me trying to repair a mechanical device or follow complex directions that involved a variety of tools, he would walk up to me, observe the chaos around me and ask, “David, do you know what it is you are doing?”
 - To which, I would gather up all my confidence and rudely exclaim, “Dad, I know what I’m doing! I don’t need any help from you or anyone else!”
 - My dad would walk away, shaking his head.
 - As I look back on those moments, I recognize my own ignorance and my dad’s wisdom.

B. We live in a society that teaches us the myth of the self-made man.

- We learn from a young age that we must become independent and pull ourselves up by our bootstraps.
- It’s all up to the individual. We must learn to do it on our own.

C. Well, that’s a bunch of hogwash!

- Yes, it’s true. If you don’t work hard, you won’t be successful. If you want to be successful, you must put in the time.
- However, no one is successful in isolation.
- To think you can do it all on your own is just foolish arrogance.
- When I was 10 years old, I was foolish and arrogant because I thought I could do everything on my own.

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- For a while, we may be able to survive on our own, but we will never thrive on our own.
 - God created us to depend on each other – each of us contributing our unique gifts to the betterment of society.
 - Most of all, God created us to be dependent on God.

II. Our Dependence on God

A. We are dependent upon God for our very existence and life.

- We depend on God for our food and hospitable environment.
- Perhaps even more significantly, we depend on God just to be decent people.

B. It is impossible for us to be decent & loving people without the presence of God.

- We have a sinful nature that causes us to be selfish – always wanting things our own way.
 - We often hurt people when we don’t get our way.
 - We gossip, attack with hurtful words, and even use knives or guns to kill people.
 - If you have a hard time accepting this reality, just watch CNN or Fox News.
 - We know we shouldn’t be this way, but we can’t seem to help it.
- Scripture describes this human predicament.
 - In Jeremiah 13:23 it says, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.”
 - Yes, we are accustomed to evil.
- We often cover up our tendency to do evil with deceit.
 - We lie to ourselves.

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- Jeremiah 17:9 teaches, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"
- This strong tendency to lie to ourselves is called rationalization.
 - The word 'rationalize' comes from two words: 'rational' and 'lies'.
 - Put the two together and you have 'rationalize'.
 - We tell ourselves intelligent sounding falsehoods to justify bad behavior.
 - This is a hard truth that's not easy to hear.
 - We're all guilty of lying to ourselves.
 - For example, we often rationalize our gossip.
 - ✓ I hear many people say, "I know this is gossip **but** you need to hear this."
 - or
 - ✓ "I know this is gossip **but** we need to pray about this."
 - ✓ People who make these statements tell themselves that they desire good for the person being talked about but, in reality, they just want to gossip.
 - ✓ That little word 'but' is packed with meaning.
 - ✓ Whenever we use that word, we probably shouldn't do what we're about to do.

C. So, here is the bottom line, we are doomed if left to be good on our own.

- BUT there is some really good news!!
- God doesn't expect us to be good on our own and never leaves us alone.
- God responds to our sinful nature with grace!!

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- GLORY HALLELUIA!!

III. Ephesians 2:8-10

- A. In Ephesians 2:8-10, Scripture tells us “For it is by **grace** you have been saved, through **faith**—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”
- B. To truly appreciate the goodness of this passage, we must understand the words **grace** and **faith**.
- C. Right before I left for vacation, I touched upon **faith** when I preached about Jesus as our Lord because **faith** is trusting Jesus as Savior and Lord.
- The following Sunday, Amy Russell also touched upon faith because she continued to speak about Jesus as Lord.
 - So, my focus now is on **grace**.
 - For the next three sermons, I will preach about receiving God’s **grace**.
 - Today, we start by defining **grace**.

IV. What is grace? It is God’s unconditional love that is made known to us through the Holy Spirit.

- A. Let me say this again: Grace is God’s unconditional love that is made known to us by the Holy Spirit.
- B. This love is unconditional because we don’t deserve it.
- Due to our strong sinful inclination, none of us has ever lived a perfect life worthy of God’s love.
 - God loves us simply because it’s God’s nature to do so.
 - God literally is love.
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- That’s why we are starting this series on grace on Pentecost Sunday.
 - Pentecost is when the Holy Spirit descended upon the church to empower the church to be the hands, arms, legs, and mouthpiece for God.
 - With Holy Spirit empowerment, we can love the unlovable, seek justice for poor, oppressed, & marginalized people and proclaim the Kingdom of God.
 - It is this same holy Spirit who makes us aware of God’s unconditional love.
- Romans 5:5 tells us about grace. It says, “...hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”
 - Whenever you read this verse, think, “This is God’s grace – God’s unconditional love being made known to us by the Holy Spirit.”

D. Look at the United Methodist logo, the cross and flames.

- It also tells us about grace.
- The flames remind us of the Holy Spirit, going back to the Pentecost story in Acts 2.
- The cross reminds us of God’s unconditional love.
- The Holy Spirit and God’s love combines to give us grace.

E. So, whenever you hear the word ‘**grace**’ think

- 1) God’s unconditional love
and
- 2) The Holy Spirit.

V. Now that we’ve defined grace, we must consider what grace does for us.

A. It saves us from both the guilt and power of sin.

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- B. Grace saves us from the guilt of sin by bringing us to the point of repentance and then offering us forgiveness.
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 - At this point, many people try to change themselves only to realize they can't do it.
 - They come to understand that the only thing they can do is receive God's forgiveness and surrender to His loving authority.
 - God's act of forgiving a repentant sinner is called justifying grace.
 - When a person receives this grace and is justified, that person is no longer condemned because he/she has been forgiven.
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 - This is how grace saves us from the guilt of sin.
 - At this point the person is born again or a new creation.
(Both terms refer to the same thing.)
- C. Once we are freed from the guilt of sin, grace begins the process of freeing us from the power of sin.
- As a 'born again' person walks in a relationship with the Father through faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit works to change that person's heart to make him/her more holy and loving like Christ.
 - This process of changing a person to make him/her more holy and loving like Christ is called sanctifying grace.
 - As we strengthen our relationship with God through worship, prayer, Bible studies, meditation, fasting and serving others, we open our hearts to God's sanctifying grace.
 - We gain more dominance over our sinful nature and find ourselves becoming the people God created us to be.

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- We find ourselves sinning less because it becomes less natural for us to do so.
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- In this way, grace frees us from the power of sin.

D. Now, sit back and enjoy a presentation by the Ignite Creative Arts ministry as they gives us a performative look at how God’s grace saves us from sin.

[Pastor leaves and the Ignite Creative Arts Ministry performers act out a skit.
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VI. One last thing about grace, God offers it to everyone, and each person can either accept it or reject it.

A. God will not force Himself on anyone because He wants a genuine love relationship with each of us.

- It’s not a loving relationship if God forces us to say yes to His offer of grace.

B. Inside your bulletin is a piece of paper.

- Write down any sinful attitude or desire that may have some control over your heart.
 - A sinful attitude or desire is anything that is keeping you from fully loving God, neighbor, and yourself.
- What you write will remain confidential.
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- Give it over to Jesus so God’s grace can give you dominion over these sinful desires or attitude.