

Welcome!

Introduction and Welcome.

Opening Prayer.

God of Grace, from Jesus we learn how to love others and how to be loved ourselves. Give us the grace to be able to show others we are mirrors of your Son Jesus. Amen.

Reading. (10 minutes)

Read **Matthew 27: 11-54**

Read aloud the whole passage.

As an alternative it may be helpful for different readers to take parts as the narrator and the key actors in the narrative. Spend some time after the reading in quietness to consider what the reading is telling you

Review your preparation notes and discuss any questions they may have raised.

Questions for reflection and discussion.

1. How do you understand what it means to say “Jesus died for my sins”?
 2. Discuss the significance of forgiveness in your life.
- In the light of Matthew 5.43-48 and Romans 12.14-21, reflect on the following questions.*
3. Does it make sense to you to see the demand for perfection to be a demand for grace rather than a demand for moral rigour?
 4. Do you think the demand to live by grace is easier or harder than a demand for moral rigour? Comment.
 5. What do you understand to be the full implications of offering forgiveness to someone who has wronged you?
 6. Is forgiveness too much of a demand in some situations? Comment.
 7. How do you understand forgiveness can bring healing?
 8. Is the offer of grace in the face of evil a naïve response to life?

Finally

Is there truth that has emerged for you in contemplation of grace over these weeks of study and reflection together? Share any new insights with each other.

Closing prayers

Share in turn around the group prayerful concerns for each other, the experience together and the journey ahead.

Refreshments and Fellowship.



Grace has a Cost

Read Matthew 27: 11-54

Read it simply as a narrative. Do not worry too much about whether you understand any particular part of the narrative or dialogue. Keep going through to the end of the passage without stopping. Then read the comments below.

His Blood be on us and our Children

There is a chilling ring to the statement on the lips of “the people as a whole” (v25) in their response to Pilate as he washes his hands of the responsibility for the death of the one whom he has determined is innocent, “His Blood be on us and our Children”. Here a pointer to the profound theological significance of the death of the Christ as truly being for the sins of the whole world. In declared innocence, Jesus bears the sins of the world and pays the price of that sinfulness. Rather than condemn, God in Christ forgives. The response of grace to wrongdoing is to forgive, and forgiveness comes at a cost to the one who forgives.

Throughout his life, and on to his death, Jesus refuses to act other than in grace; to love as he understands God loves. At any point he could have turned back from the way of grace but he refuses to, even in the face of death. In this, we declare, lies our salvation. Apart from God’s forgiveness offered by grace in Christ, we have no hope. And the cost of this is the death of Christ.

Inssofar, then, as I have ever sinned, the blood of Christ is on me. His

death is the cost of my forgiveness. The price for my wrongdoing is his blood, not mine. Confronted by my sin, the God of grace bears the consequences of my sin, rather than paying me back for my wrongdoing and using my wrongdoing as a reason for my further suffering. The death of Christ is the cost of grace to God.

In being met by grace, despite my wrongdoing, my life is transformed by God’s love and acceptance. In the experience of that transformation I am set free, inspired and empowered myself now to live by that same grace. This is the profound mystery of faith we declare in the crucified Christ.

Be Perfect as your Father in Heaven is Perfect (Matthew 5.48)

The perfection of God is the perfection of grace. The life we are now called to live is the life of grace. God has met us in grace: now we are called to meet each other and all whom we meet in grace.

Here the call to “be perfect” is not a call to some kind of moral perfection. That leads only to self-righteousness. The righteousness that “exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees” (Matthew 5.20) is a life lived in grace. It is not a life of higher moral rigorousness but a life that overflows the restrictions of moral rigour by daring to live by grace, and by grace alone, despite the cost.



Grace is not restricted in any way. For Jesus it will mean even to “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5.44).

By this we show we belong to Christ and that we are “children of (our) Father in heaven” (Matthew 5.45). Paul takes up this same theme in writing to the Roman Christians. He understands the life of grace only because he was met by grace, even when he was persecuting the followers of Jesus. Now he understands that, as his evil was not repaid by evil but confronted by grace in forgiveness, so we are called not to “repay anyone evil for evil” (Romans 12.17) and so to be “overcome by evil”, but rather to “overcome evil with good” (Romans 12.21).

The Cost of Grace

As you contemplate the cost of grace for Jesus in the cross, know there is a cost for you to live by grace. The consequences of wrongdoing will still be borne out in the life of the world. And if you are the one wronged, you will bear that cost. To live by grace means to be willing to bear that cost and confront its implications for you, and to agree not to use that cost as a justification for striking back and causing a cost to be borne by the one who has wronged you. This is what it means “to take up your cross”.

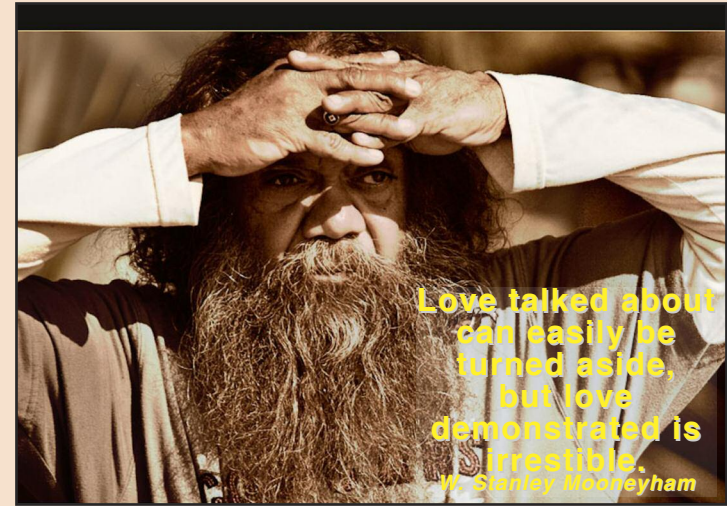
It is important not to misunderstand what living by grace and forgiving means. This is especially so for those who are the survivors of others’ abuse. Living in grace and offering forgiveness does not mean making excuses for those who have

wronged you. Nor does it mean denying the wrong others have done to you, or the effects that has had on you. Living in grace and offering forgiveness does not mean letting another continue to be abusive towards you, or excusing a wrongdoer from having to face the consequences of their wrongdoing. Nor does it deny you rightful anger at wrongdoing, or deny you the opportunity to express that anger. Living in grace and offering forgiveness requires the courage to confront wrongdoing in a way that makes healing a possibility, as much for the one who has been wronged as for anyone else. Grace and forgiveness are costly but not naïve or stupid. Above all they are not a denial of wrongdoing but a way of confronting and overcoming wrongdoing.

The gift of grace, lived out through our lives, is the gift of Christ that brings hope to a broken world. This is the hope of resurrection.

Write down any questions or comments you may have for when you meet with your group to discuss this passage.

Consider the questions under ‘contemplate’ on Page 3



I have friends whose peoples have been treated with disdain and contempt ever since the beginning of white occupation of this country. By various and violent means their humanity has been denied and their existence threatened. What has never ceased to amaze me is the grace with which so many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people whom I have met work towards a just and peaceful outcome out of the wrongs they have suffered, not just for themselves but for all Australians. While they continue to be lied to, mistreated, abused, treated as incapable, and patronised, these people have not given up on working to that godly end. So many of those who have maintained this struggle for so long, do this out of the strength that comes by faith in Jesus Christ. Their resolve is not diminished by the setbacks. In Jesus, they know God as the God of grace, and their lives have been transformed and empowered in their encounter with that God of grace. They are confident that as they live by grace, the life of this country can be transformed and we as one people can build a just and compassionate society, where everyone is set free to be the best that they can be and to offer the best they have to offer. And they have certainly paid the price, individually and as peoples, as they have lived this life of grace. They are an inspiration to us to live as God would have us live; to live by grace, despite the cost.

Contemplate: What about you! – What is your attitude towards non-white Australians? Can you justify your position? Explain with the group.

