

“Grace costs you nothing...” I can’t take credit for this line because it comes straight out of, I’ll be honest, the romance novel I just finished. *Part of Your World* tells the messy and magical love story of Daniel and Alexis as they learn to navigate and detour through a romance that causes two worlds never meant to intersect to absolutely collide. Daniel is a B&B owner with a carpentry side hustle from stereotypical small town America. He is the mayor of this town where everyone knows your name. Alexis is a doctor from Minneapolis with the weight of her family’s legacy on her shoulders, and more wealth than she knows what to do with.

The long and the short of it is that they have an unexpected meet cute thanks to a raccoon in the road and a need for a tow, and chaos and love blossom. Being in Daniel’s small town gives Alexis new perspective on the people she has been surrounded with all of her life, but of all the things that Daniel changes about her life, that one little sentence is one of the most important. At one point, she questions his faultless kindness that more often than not puts others before himself and sometimes causes sacrifices to be made on his part. Having been surrounded by the hyper-privileged in a cutthroat world from day one, Alexis doesn’t know how to process this. And Daniel tells her, he lives his life based on his grandmother’s favorite saying, “Grace costs you nothing...”

Those four little words seep into Alexis' life and change her perspective entirely. When her alleged friends are quick to type out a harsh one-star review of a perfectly nice hotel, she tells them...grace costs you nothing. When her emotionally abusive, controlling father treats others dismissively simply because he deems them beneath him, she realizes...grace costs you nothing. When she finally understands that she can use her money, her resources, her name for the betterment of others, to give them access to things previously unthought of, it finally sinks in...grace costs you nothing. It's not always an easy lesson to learn, in fact it's one that we often rail against entirely, despite the fact that it is written all over every aspect, every detail, every moment of Jesus' life and ministry.

As we say goodbye to the Easter season and wade our toes into the long slog that is the green season, ordinary time, the season after Pentecost, it's a good time for a couple of reminders. Firstly, this season is the season of the church, it's why its so long because we are the ones that need the most lessons, the most time to learn. It is a time for us to walk through Jesus' ministry and hear where it is calling us in our own mission. You could think about it like green means growth, this is our season to figure out how we want to keep growing the faith Jesus has handed over to us. Secondly, it's been a hot second since we've spent some time with Mark even though we

are in the midst of his gospel year, so a couple of reminders. Mark is the earliest gospel we have, and it most likely served as the outline and inspiration for Matthew and Luke. Mark is not in the business of details, he is the *Dragnet* of the gospels, “Just the facts, ma’am.” He isn’t interested in overanalysis and deep theology, he is interested in telling people that this is what Jesus said and did because he is the Son of God. An editor would have looked at Mark’s gospel and been like, dude, we gotta work on your transitions, because you can’t use “immediately” *all the time*. Things happen fast and furious in Mark simply because he wants to get to the point: Jesus is the Son of God, who was crucified for the sake of the world. That is the gospel, who needs more details than that?

So, for the first time in forever, we dive back into Mark practically at the beginning. Jesus is *extremely* early in his ministry. He has been baptized and tempted, he has called the first disciples, and *immediately* he finds himself in trouble, because of those disciples he just called. We can assume this is sometime on a Saturday morning or early afternoon. Jesus and the disciples are walking between locations, and are passing through a grain field. Now, it behooves us to remember that the disciples were probably *young*. These are guys potentially in their late teens and early twenties, who have *no clue* what they have signed up for in this whole

follow me and fish for people business. They know little of Jesus' intention for ministry and so they're strolling along and they're hungry. So what do they do? Hey look, grain! They pluck some of the heads of grain and eat them and LORD you would think the apocalypse had come early.

Already, Jesus has attracted the attention of those in power and so they're hovering around him, observing, testing the waters, trying to figure out what this Jesus guy's deal is. Well, apparently his deal is encouraging just ignoring the law!!! They lose it. This isn't lawful! Why are you letting them do this? Don't you *see* what is going on? They can't do that! I kind of picture Jesus initially rolling his eyes, like guys, c'mon, even David ate the food of the presence in a moment of desperation, let's cut them a little slack here. He reminds them that the Sabbath was given to humanity by God as a gift not as a burden. It's ok. Grace costs you nothing...

The day continues...and they find themselves at the synagogue for Sabbath worship. Amidst the crowds, Jesus sees a man with a withered hand. In an agrarian society, a withered hand probably means this man has little means to eke out a life for himself, he would have been dependent on others, life would have been hard. The Pharisees are now chomping at the bit, a little bit of grain is one thing, but *healing*, in the synagogue, *on* the Sabbath? There's just no way he'd go that far. But of course...he does. He

calls the man forward and dares the Pharisees to challenge him. Are they really going to tell him it isn't lawful to heal, to save a life just because it's the Sabbath? Is that what they think God's gift meant? To deny another human being life just because of what day it is? They say nothing and Jesus' incredulousness turns to anger. He heals the man and already, the Pharisees are looking to destroy him. Grace costs you nothing...unless you're Jesus...and then, well, grace may cost you your life...

We sit here as Lutherans who are supposed to be people of grace. I mean, grace is kind of our thing. What is our biggest phrase? We are "saved by grace through faith." When Luther summed up the theology he was forming, he said it was faith alone, scripture alone, grace alone. Luther constantly was telling people that we received grace by zero work of our own, it has nothing to do with us, and everything to do with God and Jesus. It is freely given, no expectations, no caveats, no mark the box to make sure you've read the terms and conditions. And yet, despite all of our claims of being people of grace, we just don't always get it, for ourselves or for others.

When I shared with the Bible study folks this phrase that kept popping into my head, grace costs you nothing, one of them piped up...well except control, and it's true. Grace requires of us a deep letting go of control and power, it says that we are going to prioritize compassion and hope over

everything else and more often than not we're just not super interested in that kind of living. This was precisely the Pharisees problem. If they gave the ok to the disciples plucking grain and Jesus healing on the Sabbath, well then it was a slippery slope to the all of the law being flouted and if the law has that many loopholes, then all of their power and control is gone.

They're the keepers of the law and if they don't have that, then what do they have? They'd have grace...but what is that really worth?

We tend to do the same thing. If we embrace this grace thing than that just opens all sorts of doors for love and compassion. It may put us in the position of loving people that previously we had no interest in even talking to, let alone loving. It may put us in the position of loving ourselves, rather than constantly berating ourselves about all of our mistakes, shortcomings, and failures. Now, it must be said, grace doesn't mean giving up on accountability, grace isn't an excuse to be steamrolled, but it is a door to letting go of all of the meaningless, little, petulant stuff that more often than not ties us up in bigger knots than the actual, big, life-altering stuff.

The colleague at work who doesn't answer emails in the timeliness that you would like them to. The typos and errors that pop up in different pieces of paper that cross your desk, your lap, your screen. The person who dares to drive the literal speed limit through Hilton Village. The wait staff

who doesn't get to your table as quickly or as frequently as you would like them to. The friend or family member who tries to talk about issues of injustice and equity and you're just tired of hearing about that stuff all the time. The short temper you took with your kids after an exceedingly long work day. The short temper your kids had with you after an exceedingly long school day. The appointment that was forgotten. The birthday you missed. Grace costs you nothing...and in fact, it might make life a little bit calmer, a little more peaceful, a little more joyful.

What is more important? Doing everything right? Everything down to the letter? Exactly by the book? Or doing things with compassion? Doing things with a bent towards seeing the humanity of our siblings and the humanity of ourselves? Is it better to be in control and have power than it is to be kind and considerate? What matters to us more? Our fellow siblings? The love God has given us? Or being right? Being in control? Being the one that has all the answers? For each of us, the answer may be different, but it dares us to ask why? Why is grace the hardest thing we can give, when it is literally the greatest thing Jesus gave us? Why is grace hard to receive when we accept that Jesus gave up his life for us? We'll pay umpteen dollars for any number of things, so why do we find it so hard to give grace, when grace costs us nothing? **AMEN!!!**