



Parish of
St Peter Woking
St Peter's · St Mark's · All Souls'



Sunday 6th September

PREPARATION

Welcome

Leader O Lord, open our lips

All and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Leader O God, make speed to save us.

All O Lord, make haste to help us.

Leader Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;

**All as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Leader Praise the Lord.

All The Lord's name be praised.

Hymn **454** **Majesty**

*Majesty, worship His majesty
unto Jesus be all glory honour and
praise*

*Majesty, kingdom, authority
flows from His throne
unto His own
His anthem raise.*

*So exalt, lift upon high
the name of Jesus
magnify come glorify
Christ, Jesus the king*

*Majesty, worship his majesty
Jesus who died, now glorified
King of all kings*

Opening activity

Confession

Leader The gospel calls us to turn away from sin
and be faithful to Christ.

As we offer ourselves to him
in penitence and faith,
we renew our confidence and trust in his mercy.

**All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you and against our neighbour**

in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name. Amen.

Absolution

Leader Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent,
have mercy upon *us*,
pardon and deliver *us* from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen *us* in all goodness,
and keep *us* in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Collect (*Prayer for the day*)

Almighty God,
who called your Church to bear witness that you were in Christ
reconciling the world to yourself:
help us to proclaim the good news of your love,
that all who hear it maybe drawn to you;
through him who was lifted up on the cross,
and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Testimony ~ Francis Collins

Hymn 914 Only by grace

Only by grace can we enter
Only by grace can we stand
Not by our human endeavour
But by the blood of the Lamb
Into Your presence You call us
You call us to come
Into Your presence You draw us
And now by Your grace we come

Now by Your grace we come
Lord if You mark our
transgressions
Who would stand
Thanks to Your grace we are
cleansed
By the blood of the Lamb

Bible Readings

Romans 3:20-24 – Jacquie Still – St Peter's

²⁰Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. ²¹But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²²This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Reader This is the word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God

Acts 9:1-19a – (Acted out ~Elliot Johnson)

¹Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

⁶"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. ¹⁰In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.

¹¹The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹²In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

¹³"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. ¹⁴And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

¹⁵But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. ¹⁶I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

¹⁷Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord--Jesus, who appeared to you on the

road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

¹⁸Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Reader This is the word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God

Sermon Jonathan Thomas

By the grace of God

Bob had a dog named Mace who loved eating grass, so Bob had to keep him indoors to stop his lawn getting devoured. One evening Bob was working on his car on his driveway and dropped his wrench losing it in the long grass in his garden next to the drive which had become terribly overgrown. He had a look for it, but it was getting dark so he gave up. That night Mace escaped from the house and ate all the grass on the lawn. The next morning Bob looked out of his window and saw his wrench glinting in the sunlight. Realising what had happened he looked up to heaven and proclaimed "A grazing Mace, how sweet the hound that saved a wrench for me!"

Apologies for that corny story, but it helps to introduce our theme today as we explore the grace of God. As you know over the last 3 months we have been looking at some of the lesser known characters in the early church as told in the book of Acts, and over the next 2 months we'll be exploring the well-known character of the apostle Paul through some of his exploits in the book of Acts, as well as his specific passions in some of his letters.

Paul began life as Saul, a fervent Jew who wanted to eradicate the early church which he saw as a dangerous sect that was leading people away from true Judaism towards a false Messiah, Jesus. Working in conjunction with the Jewish high priest he travelled around the region making death threats to Christians and arresting them in the synagogues where they gathered to preach about Jesus. They proclaimed to the Jews that Jesus was not only the true Messiah they had been waiting so long for, but also the son of God who died for their sins so that they needed to repent, be baptised and filled with the gift of God's Holy Spirit.

Now as we know God's ways are not our ways, so who does he choose to be the leading evangelist who would dramatically grow and shape the

early church? Well the person who most hates it and wants it to be destroyed of course! Saul of Tarsus.

There are many ways that people come to faith in Jesus. Some, like me, through a loving Christian upbringing that grounded me in the faith until I came to know Jesus for myself as a teenager. Then there is Francis Collins, the top American scientist who headed the human genome project and is on the White House Coronavirus Taskforce, who came to faith as an adult through the witness of and support from Christians which led him to explore the rational side of the Christian faith, as we heard in his video testimony at the start of the service

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pl-fhLjz2Ac>).

But for Saul to come to faith in Christ, God knew he needed to intervene and do something dramatic and so on that famous road to Damascus Jesus appeared to him in a blinding heavenly light, spoke to him and revealed himself to Saul as Jesus, the one he had effectively been persecuting, through the persecution of his followers. We don't hear anything of Saul's reaction during this experience except to ask who it is revealing himself to him, but we do see how God humbles and weakens this proud man by blinding him and causing him to fast, going without food or water for three days. The man who was totally in control of his life and the lives of others has lost total control not only of his life, but his body. He is brought low and suffers, though in a much smaller way than the suffering he caused to many Christians. And this suffering is a sign of the suffering that he would go through in his new life proclaiming the good news of Jesus. He has swapped teams – from United to City, Scotland to England, Labour to Tory, the persecutor to the persecuted.

Saul doesn't get one of the twelve apostles rushing to Damascus to help him at the start of his faith. Rather God uses an unassuming Christian, Ananias who we heard about a few weeks ago, to restore his sight, fill him with the Holy Spirit and baptise him. Saul goes from the top of one heap to the bottom of another, a radical turnaround in anyone's book.

And the key word in his conversion is grace. In his letters Saul, now called Paul, never boasts about his own great achievements as an evangelist, of which there were many. He doesn't talk about his considered decision to follow Jesus or his hunger for the truth. No, he was bumped into it by God, he couldn't avoid the dramatic encounter on the road to Damascus (though he still had the choice not to follow Jesus). It was all an act of

God's grace leading him to the wonders of knowing Christ and serving him; Paul's only part was his response to God's grace.

Now grace is probably my favourite word in the bible and is full of depth. It is so counter-intuitive to the way of the world and it speaks volumes of God's amazing love for me. I love going through the words of the wedding service with couples, usually just a few weeks before they get married when they are full of excitement and joy, because it gives me an opportunity not just to explain what the promises they will be making to each other in a Christian marriage service mean, but to help them see that the love they have for each other is an outpouring of God's love and grace for them. When I ask them what the word grace means most have no idea, so I love explaining that God's grace is a free gift from Him to us, something we have done nothing to earn or deserve, just given to us out of his love. I explain that the unique love they have for each other as a couple about to commit themselves to each other in marriage is grace – not something they have earned or deserve, not a right that everyone should have, but something that God in the outpouring of his love to them has blessed them with. It is something to be treasured and thankful for, not taken for granted or demanded.

Paul recognised that his dramatic conversion was an amazing act of God's grace, because not only was he a sinner, as every human being is, but because, as he describes in 1 Timothy 1:16, he was the worst of sinners, someone who actively sought to harm Jesus' followers, who was fighting against Jesus. If God were not a God of grace who had a purpose for Paul's life the Damascus road experience could easily, and justifiably, have been one where God permanently blinded him or even killed him to stop him persecuting his church without an opportunity for him to repent and start afresh.

Paul also recognised that God's grace was not cheap, it came at a cost. A helpful acronym for Grace is **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**. God's free, undeserved gift of salvation and forgiveness of sins for Paul, and each of us, only happened because Jesus took the punishment that we deserved for our sins through his most agonising death on the cross. Not only was it one of the worst ways to die, excruciatingly painful and drawn out, but at his death Jesus, God the Son, was separated from God the Father with whom he had the most complete relationship, because he bore our sins. We must never forget that not only is God's grace to us free and

undeserved, but it came at great cost because of the immense love God has for us.

As we have briefly explored the grace of God in Paul's conversion there are 3 questions I would like us to consider:

1. Do we know Jesus as our Lord and Saviour as Paul did? Do we know that we are loved by God and that he longs for us to know him, to live as his children? If not and you want to then pray, ask him to be number one in your life, repent of your sins and he will forgive you and give you a new start. Or if you have questions then please contact me, Sam, Rachel or a Christian friend and we'd love to talk with you more.

If you do know Jesus as your saviour then who are there people you long to encounter Christ as Paul did? Share your story with them, pray for them and keep on praying. And who knows, they may become a Paul, someone who

2. Do we know God's grace in our lives or are we trying to fight it? We may be a follower of Jesus, but we find it hard to accept his undeserved grace. We feel we have to earn his love by doing good, and it's wearing, we constantly feel we let him down. Discover his grace afresh, that you are unconditionally loved by your heavenly Father and nothing you do will make him love you more or less. The book 'What's so amazing about grace?' by Philip Yancey is a fabulous one and let me know if you would like to borrow it.
3. Have we cheapened God's grace? Do we continue to sin thinking that it doesn't matter that much, God is gracious and forgives us every time we say sorry so we don't need to change our behaviour, it's just how we are? That attitude cheapens the amazing sacrifice Christ gave through his death for us on the cross. It undermines our status as children of the living God because we are living as if we are not part of his family. If we are living this way repent, and seek the Holy Spirit's help to take seriously our call to become more and more Christ-like.

We began our service with reflections on new starts for those studying or working in schools, so can I encourage all of us to be inspired by God's grace and seek a new start by either accepting Jesus as Lord as Paul did,

praying for others to do so, or understanding God's amazing grace in a fresh way that will transform our lives. Let's pray.

Loving God, thank you for your amazing grace shown by Jesus' death for us. May we know the depths of your wonderful grace day by day and live accordingly as your beloved, forgiven children. Amen

Hymn 254 I Am a New Creation

I am a new creation,
no more in condemnation,
here in the grace of God I stand.

My heart is overflowing,
my love just keeps on growing,
here in the grace of God I stand.

And I will praise You, Lord,
yes I will praise You, Lord,
and I will sing of all that You have
done.

A joy that knows no limit,
a lightness in my spirit
here in the grace of God I stand.

Creed (We declare our faith by saying the Apostle's Creed)

**All I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers ~ Sue Harvey

Lord God, we acknowledge you as our Creator and loving Father, and we thank you for the precious gift of prayer; it is wonderful to know that you

are ready to listen whenever we speak to you: help us to be ready to listen whenever you speak to us.

For the sake of your son, our saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

O God, we thank you for the gift of life

and for the faculties which enable us to enjoy it.

You have given us our eyes to see the beauty of your world,

our ears to hear speech and the sound of music,

our lips with which to speak in friendship to others,

and our hands with which to minister to their needs.

May we always feel your love and grace, your caring hand and

encouraging support. Help us to use all that we have in your service and

for your greater glory

through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

At this time of the year (and especially in this unusual year) we think of all the young people and teachers we know for whom a time of change lays ahead.

Some will be starting school for the first time and some leaving their Primary School, where they know everyone, to move on to a larger school with many new people to meet and new routines to learn. For these, and for their families, there will be some times of anxiousness during the next few weeks.

O God our Father,

We pray for the pupils, teachers and teaching assistants going back to school at the beginning of this new school year. We pray for their health and safety as classrooms and schools have been modified to allow for proper social distancing and hygiene. We pray too for the caretakers, cleaners and caterers, as well as the office staff.

We pray that you would keep them all safe and protected from the virus. Please protect the families of the pupils and teachers as they return home each day and slow the spread of the virus so that it will not infect these families.

Father, we also pray for energy and rest for the teachers so that they would be able to plan their lessons and teach their classes effectively and that their pupils will be able to settle in, learn and keep up with their lessons.

For those who have moved on to college, university, or employment, fill them with enthusiasm and hope as they set about achieving their goals in life.

Guide their lives according to your will as they reach for their dreams. Keep them hopeful if they fail and modest if they succeed. Help them to remember that they are never alone but that you will always be close to them.

We ask all this in the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

We remember those who are unwell or unhappy. We remember especially Peter and Eileen Bliss, Olive Park, Len Reeder, Joy Storkey and those at home alone, both young and old and also those who mourn the death of someone dear to them, especially the family and friends of Bob Baker. In a time of silence we remember someone who is known to us personally.

Father God, we pray for those for whom this day will seem long and hard, for those in hospital or ill at home, those struggling with despair or depression, those waiting for a job, or important news, or a friend to call. We name in our hearts any people we know in special need.

Comfort and heal all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit; bless them and those who look after them, so that they can put their whole trust in you and be filled with your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

We pray for our clergy – and for all those who lead our services – especially at this time with the additional tasks necessary to provide the online services.

Lord Jesus,

We pray for Jonathan, Sam and Mick and for all those who minister to us
Keep them faithful when things are difficult and humble when things go
well.

May your word be in their hearts and on their lips,
and may they commend you to others
by what they are as well as by what they say;
for the glory of your name. Amen

And finally, we pray for ourselves

Lord, you are the wind in my sails,
You guide me as I steer and find direction.

You give me the strength to keep on going.
You watch over me as I navigate stormy seas.
You are the harbour where I stop for rest.
You are my encourager when I lose hope.
You are the lighthouse that keeps my path safe.
You are with me always.

Thank you. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Leader Gathering our prayers and praises into one, let us pray with confidence the prayer that Jesus taught us:

**All Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Notices

Hymn **Amazing grace (my chains are gone)**

Amazing grace
How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind, but now I see

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed

*My chains are gone
I've been set free
My God, my Saviour has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy rains
Unending love, Amazing grace*

The Lord has promised good to me
His word my hope secures
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures

My chains are gone....

The Earth shall soon dissolve like snow
The sun forbear to shine
But God, Who called me here below
Will be forever mine
Will be forever mine
You are forever mine

Blessing

This or another blessing may be said

Leader Go forth into the world in peace; be of good courage;
 hold fast that which is good; render to no one evil for evil;
 strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak;
 help the afflicted; honour everyone; love and serve the Lord,
 rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit;
 and the blessing ...

All Amen.

Worshipping ▶ Loving ▶ Sharing ▶ Growing

