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Grace

Lessons in Leadership

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, YEAR A

Concluding our series on leadership, this worship focuses on the transformative power of leading with grace and the ongoing work of reconciliation. We will explore how true grace isn't about avoiding conflict or being overly permissive, but rather acting as a conduit for God's abundant forgiveness while maintaining healthy boundaries. Through communal reflection, confession, and specific rituals of reconciliation, the service will provide a safe space to lament our hurts, extend forgiveness, and discern our next right steps together.

REFERENCES

Exodus 14:19-31

Psalm 114

Romans 14:1-12

Matthew 18:21-35

COLORS

Green

Worship Planning Notes

Focus text: Exodus 14:19-31, Matthew 18:21-35

Have you ever had one of those moments where your perspective on life shifted? A moment you can mark as the time everything changed? I've had a couple, but the earliest was the summer I was twelve and went to church camp for the first time. I grew up in a United Methodist congregation, and, to use the verbiage of that time, accepted Jesus Christ as my savior when I was seven. But for a

couple of years before that summer, I had gone through moments of doubting if I was truly saved. I know; it's a lot for a kid to navigate, but it happened, and I was often quite scared I hadn't done something right. So, there I am at camp, praying for help as I had for so long, and suddenly, I knew. Like a flood, assurance washed over me. John Wesley's whole "heart strangely warmed thing"? I believe it because I experienced it. To this day, that experience is a grounding point for my faith journey. With that experience of assurance came an overwhelming sense of the vastness and abundance of God's grace for me, yes, but also for everyone.

When we talk about leadership and grace, it's easy to confuse our terms. In the context of Exodus and Matthew, leading with grace is not about keeping one's composure or aligning with societal expectations. It's also not about being permissive and submissive to others for the sake of avoiding conflict. Rather, leading with grace is about living as a conduit of the grace that flows abundantly for us and therefore through us to our neighbors. We are cleansed, inspired, redeemed, and formed by grace that we may be God's agents of grace. Grace holds boundaries while extending forgiveness when boundaries are crossed. Grace tells the truth without shaming others. Grace recognizes that we all have gifts and strengths that benefit the community and finds ways for us to work collectively rather than in competition. All of this and more is made possible by grace and, by extension, forgiveness.

If last week was about navigating conflict, this week is about reconciliation. Without grace, reconciliation is impossible. Through grace, Jesus tells us we keep the door open to reconciliation always. Over and over. We don't write people off as irredeemable. We don't throw people out because they keep making the same mistakes. We expect people to grow, but we don't give up on them when they don't grow as fast as or in the ways we expect.

As we conclude this series, consider how the previous weeks might build into this final week. Are there examples of leadership from week one that you might bring back for this final week? Is there a hymn you already sang that bears repeating? Perhaps you want to explore a ritual of reconciliation that holds space for people to extend forgiveness to themselves and to take even small steps toward forgiving others who have hurt them. Sometimes all we need is space to lament what hurts and confess where we've messed up to discern the next right step to take. Throughout your planning, find ways to acknowledge communal sin and communal pain. It is quite easy to take these passages and focus on individual responses. And there's certainly room and reason to do so. But consider, too, how your congregation as a community may need tending and space to lament, confess, and forgive as an exercise in gracious leadership now and in the future.

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