

Sermon: Stewarding God's Manifold Grace**Scripture: I Peter 4:7-11****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: October 24, 2021**

Peter's letter written sometime around 60 CE is directed to Christians who are experiencing persecution and marginalization in Asia Minor which is basically modern day Turkey and Peter is encouraging these Christians to hold tight to their commitment to Jesus and his way despite their hardships. And what's remarkable about what Peter is asking of them is the simplicity of it, the humbleness of it. He starts off this section of the letter with a dire prediction – "this is the end of all things", a great turning, the shifting of an age and sure enough within a decade of his writing the center of the Jewish world and the temple cult of Jerusalem will be in shambles and all things that they knew til then would be done and gone, the end of all things that currently shape and determine their lives.

And in the face of these persecutions and this felt sense of a coming catastrophic ending of the age, Peter suggests what? Does he suggest they storm the temple and protect it from being overtaken by Rome? Or join forces to defeat the enemy? Or does he frame it as a spiritual battle needing to be waged to confront the legions of evil corrupting their country and religion? No, he tells them to be alert and sober in mind so you can better pray for what is needed. And he writes "love each other, deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins." And he reminds them to offer hospitality to one another and, if you can imagine this, he tells them to do it without grumbling! And he says serve one another and be stewards of the manifold grace of God."

What a remarkable set of requests given his initial – the end of all things is near. The end of all things is near so love more deeply. In light of persecution and fear and threat, follow ever more faithfully the way of Christ which is the way of love. Apparently as the threat and fear and injustice and violence ratchets up so too does the need to follow the Christ's way of love more deeply and increase our hospitable to one another.

It's the small insignificant acts of mercy and care over the days and days of our lives, the smallest obediences, that God asks of us rather than dramatic stands of righteousness and world transforming acts of heroism. The way of Christ is the way of humble service not just to those we love but even and especially to those we don't. And its when our backs are up against a wall and when we are feeling the threat of the other that it becomes all the more important to love and love deeply.

“Be stewards”, Peter says, “of the manifold grace of God”. Use whatever gifts you have received to serve others and be stewards of the manifold grace of God. That's your job, that's my job as those who know Jesus and have been nurtured by these holy scriptures, we who sense the real presence of Jesus in our hearts and in this world, our job is to be stewards of God's grace, of God's manifold miraculous mysterious grace.

It looks different depending on who is doing the serving. With the particular gifts God has given each of us, and we have all been given such gifts, our job our purpose is to use those gifts to steward God's grace. What is your gift that you have been given? What circles has the Holy Spirit of God drawn your life into and what role do you play in those circles and how do you in all your particularity steward Gods' grace through your life? When you have been the recipient of

God's grace by the very life you've been given, by the many blessings you've experienced, by the deeper knowledge of God's love you've come to know in Jesus Christ, by whatever moments of mystery and miracle that have made you feel seen and known and blessed by the God of your life, the only response to all of that is to work to be conduits of that grace and mercy for others as well.

But this is not something that we have to work at alone. A way that we can steward God's grace forward into this world more effectively is by being a part of a collective of people, a community, of others that has the clear purpose of stewarding God's grace in and through this world. Isn't that a beautiful purpose and wouldn't you want to be a part of that kind of place if you could find an organization that has the sole purpose of being stewards God's grace? Oh, wait a minute, we are a part of that community, we are actually sitting in it right now! Oh right, it's the church! It's this church! I mean, we've said it with a few more words – "we are Christ-centered nurturing community, growing in faith, serving in love and welcoming all with joy!" – but that's essentially what that means that we are purpose is to be stewards of God's grace.

I mean we are going off to hire an Associate Pastor for Youth and Families because we want to ensure that God's grace is experienced by all the people in this church and we worship together and on-line with the hope that the act of worship will be a conveyor of God's grace. We walk at Outdoor Church and we serve at the Dwelling place and build at Habitat for humanity to be stewards of God's grace. And we care for one another, make meals, and pray for each other and offer healing touch to steward the grace of God. And we sing and host incredible musical and art events welcoming in the community to experience God's grace in the form of beautiful art, right?

Of course we fail at times and of course we could do better at other times and maybe we miss a grace that could be given, but I am grateful to be a part of an organization that has this as it's purpose. I mean, there are a ton of organizations that we can be a part of and fill our time with, but this is a pretty special one that has this as it's primary purpose, to share God's grace in manifold ways – through worship and prayer and play and music and education and serving others, all towards the end of being faithful stewards of the manifold grace of God.

And if things get really bad in this country, if the future is a lot harder and more full of crisis than we have ever known, you know what this church needs to do about it? Rise up and storm the capital and offer some heroic effort to ensure our own safety and privilege? No, of course not. If that happens and the end of all things come, which is might some day for this country and world and the way we know things to be, it really might, and you know what we will be called to do as a church? To love more deeply, to remain sober and prayerful, to be hospitable to all. Cause that's our purpose, that's our call, and the greater the crisis the more critical such little obediences towards stewarding God's grace will become.

So thank you for your support of our church and all the work it does to try and steward God's grace. Please consider in this time of the Pledge Drive what you can pledge towards our efforts. Our money itself, given generously, can become a resource for stewarding God's grace through this church community. It's a good place to support, a loving community to be a part of, a devoted group of Christians to throw in your lot with, thanks be to God!