Prevenient Grace Face-To-Face Talk Rev. Renee Lawrence

New-Ark Emmaus August 4, 2018

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Will you turn to page 48 in your Worship book and join me in the Prayer to the Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth. O. God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

I wish I could tell you every instance in my life in which God had prepared the safe space for me to walk through fire or step on dry ground between two walls of water.

I will soon be 70, and I have moved 41 times. On purpose. I have stepped out on the path of my own willfulness, or tagged along with someone else’s willfulness, and I have stepped out where God told me to go. Of those moves, the ones which brought blessing to my life were the ones I didn’t want to make.

I drove through Enid, Oklahoma in the early 80’s, and said to my husband; “I never ever want to live in a town like this.” Where do you think God sent me to seminary?

I drove through Parrish, Florida once and turned to my passenger and said, “I never ever want to live in a town like this.” Where do you think God sent me in 1994?

The first time I came to Ohio with my husband we went to visit his son Joe in Coshocton. Driving out of town what stupid thing do you think came out of my mouth? And I spent 7 years in Coshocton.   
 Etc, Etc, Etc.

The title of this talk is **[^]** Prevenient Grace, and my name is **[^]** Renee Lawrence.

Throughout my talk I will use Scripture references. These are listed at the top of your talk outline handout. When I make key point, it will also be on a slide and on your handout.

Prevenient Grace is a state of Grace that is a gift of God, one we cannot earn and cannot change.

**I Define Prevenient Grace**

A. The word **[^] Grace is from the Greek Charis which means gift**. Christ offers us the GIFT of relationship that includes salvation, reconciliation and eternal life.

**[^] We cannot earn it and cannot stop God from giving it.**

The book of Ephesians, Chapter 2, Verses 4-9 4But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us 5even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ[[a](https://www)]—by grace you have been saved— 6and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— 9not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

The Apostle Paul would attest that this scripture could also be read thus:

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us when we did not deserve it, could not deserve it, for one reason or another.

**[^ picture]** My Dad was an alcoholic. He had lost both parents by 13, and afterwards was abused physically and emotionally by his Uncle, with whom he was left. He was a heavy drinker by 14, and continued that self-medicating all through his life. He was pretty young in that picture, but he didn’t age well or father well, and eventually his career fell apart. He served in the Army Europe from Dec 1944 to August 1945, and he saw atrocities he could not discuss. He could not conceive of a loving God. Yet right in the middle of that terrible life, God was loving and beckoning my Dad.

B. God’s **[^] Grace comes in [^] many forms with many facets**. In Face-to-Face you will hear about these forms as you hear about prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace. They all relate to various stages of our spiritual journey. You will also hear about Means of Grace, which are the ways God interacts with us.

**[^] Prevenient Grace spans the time of our life from conception to conversion**, from the moment God is forming the cells, and layers of tissue and organs that make up a viable human body.

The Psalmist said it this way:

The book of Psalms, Chapter 139, Verses 13-15

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. 14  I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. 15  My frame was not hidden from you,

when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

God goes before us in all things.

Jesus goes before us in all things.   
 Christ gives us **[^] Grace that comes before any of our decisions or endeavors.**

Prevenient Grace is the **[^] love of God [^] wooing us, drawing us, pursuing us, waiting for us, freeing us, empowering us.**

I perceived God to be calling me to belief when I was seven, and was baptized when I was eight. During my adolescence when home life was extremely difficult, God put many devout and long-suffering Christians in my path as youth leaders and sponsors. I was raised in many ways in church kitchens, on youth or bell-choir trips, and worship. None of that was my excellent plan. It was God wooing, preparing and shaping me.

It was the will of God drawing me into a life-giving relationship.

The Gospel of John, Chapter 6, Verse 44 says: 44 No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day.

God pursues us to bring us into friendship and into a love that will never let us go.

In the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 15, Verse 4-6 Jesus says:

“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6 and goes home.

5 God’s Grace frees us so that we can respond to the offer of relationship.

**II. [^] The biblical message is clear: [^] Human beings are created in God’s likeness for a relationship with the Divine.**

A. In the beginning when God created[a] the heavens and the earth, 2 the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God[b] swept over the face of the waters.

And at each stage, God saw that it was good

**[^ picture]** I spent several years teaching Lamaze/ Childbirth classes. I loved it. I could witness to parents that their unborn children were not in that womb alone.

God designed our human bodies and souls. I believe God lives in the very tiniest bits of our matter. God lives in us at a cellular level. The smallest parts of our beings are Quarks and Leptons. God lives in our Quarks and Leptons.

Prevenient Grace comes from the Latin praevenire (prevenyoura) “to come before”. A God who lives in our inmost being is a God who comes before.

B. Genesis 1 & 2 tell us that God created us male and female, and declared that they we were good. God then enjoyed the relationship with them, walking the garden and mentoring them.

C. This is bad news for sin, because sin itself was preceded by the good news of our origin in God. We were grounded in, created in Original Blessing, as described in the book of that name by Rev. Dr. Matthew Fox.

Fox says, “The fact is that what we know from the nuclear stories is that, for 15 billion years, the universe has been preparing our way; getting the temperature right, the ozone layer balanced, the oxygen level perfect,” all for the blessing of the human condition. Prevenient Grace expressed in physics.

**III [^] God constantly offers us a relationship. [^] Even the worst of us, or at our worst times.**

People can make wrong choices that separate us from God’s love. Everyone falls short of the Glory of God. Yet since we are wired at a cellular, Quarks level, to yearn for God, the God who formed out inmost parts, the God that never fails us.

Up front we get a promise from God: The Book of Hebrews, Chapter 13, Verse 5. “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

From day one, Sin lost. **[^] God’s love and grace are greater than all our wrong choices**.

We are never too young for the relationship nor can we ever be too old. When we aren’t even able to comprehend that we need God, God is already at work on our behalf. This is covenant love.

The Book of Jeremiah, Chapter 29, Verses11-13 says

11 For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. 12 Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. 13 When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart.

In the summer of 2011, the church I served finished building a bright red lighthouse on the corner of our property. We had not determined what we would write on the banner to hang on the lighthouse, when 911 happened. Within days, we were able to hang a banner that said, “God always has a plan to save the world.” Because God is always out front.

**[^] To believe in Prevenient Grace is to always trust that God is out ahead of every situation making plans, for the purpose of bestowing plans for our welfare and our future.**

But Prevenient Grace does not always work at the same speed or the same manner in each life. **[^ blank screen]** My poor broken father had never accepted Christ, until a man came from church (sent at just the right time by God). Brad Kidder was also an alcoholic, and he brought my Dad to Christ a mere three years before Dad’s premature death. Brad could speak a language Dad’s broken heart could hear, when none of anyone else’s words could ever have done.

Finally Dad knew that: as Romans 8:38-39 says 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That’s how deliberately and stubbornly God loves us.

6. And that is how God also empowers us, giving us spiritual strength.

IV. **[^] How do we experience God’s Prevenient Grace?**

We find God in **[^] events, both positive and negative, through [^] the sacrifices others make for us, and through [^] the body of believers, the church.**

**The [^] Holy Spirit comes and awakens our conscience**, convincing us that we can never earn a place in God’s family. The Holy Spirit courts, nudges, invites and beckons us with open arms. Sometimes the Holy Spirit has been a discernible push between my shoulder blades!

**[^ blank screen]** In 1983, my husband of 15 years, father of my two daughters, came back from a trip and announced that he wanted a divorce. For 18 years I had idolized and adored him to an unhealthy degree, even turning my back on God to please my husband. I was completely devastated. For weeks, I cried or sat in stony disbelief, my chest hurting with each breath. After many weeks of agony, I finally had a weekend in which I did not have to put up a brave and graceful face before my children. That night, I began weeping just after sunset and cried into the long horrible night. I was sure my life was ruined.

When at last I had wept until I could hardly breathe and my eyes were painful, I lay silent at last, except for great hiccuping sobs. Out of the silence, I heard it. As 1 The Book of 1st Kings, Chapter 19, Verses 11-13 says, “not out of the wind, or the earthquake, but out of silence”, I heard a whisper. A Still small voice.

“I Love you, Renee, and that will be enough”

That is a trinitarian statement. God expressed love now, into the future, and offered a promise.

I love you

not someone else, but me by name, you by name

and that will be

God intends that in the future it will be

enough. in God’s terms enough equals bounty

A plan God has for our welfare to give us a future and a hope.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. And it will be enough.

My question for you in your Face-to-Face encounter is this: **[^] will you open your heart to God to accept the relationship God offers or reoffers you in Jesus Christ?**

It will be enough.

**[^]** De Colores! **[^ black screen]**

Scripture List

Ephesians 2: 4-9

Psalm 139: 13-15

John 6: 44

Luke 15: 4-5

Genesis 1, 2

Hebrews 13: 5

Jeremiah 29: 11-13

Romans 8: 38-39

1 Kings 19: 11-13

Book Reference:

Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality Presented in Four Paths, Twenty-Six Themes, and Two Questions, Rev. Dr. Matthew Fox, TarcherPerigee; 1st Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam ed edition (October 9, 2000).