



Grace 2021 – week 6

God's grace for others - 2

w/c 14 March 2021

"God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things which should be changed and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other."

(Reinhold Niebuhr)

Read Jonah 4

You will need to look back to Jonah 3 to see what has annoyed him. In responding to God, Jonah quotes Joel 2:13 (itself, in part, a quote from Exodus 34:6) – *"the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness"*. Looking on to verse 7 of that Exodus source, it seems that Jonah was more concerned that God would, *"not leave the guilty unpunished"* rather than remembering that he will *"forgive wickedness, rebellion and sin"*. How do we avoid Jonah-like reactions to events around us today?

Jonah went to Nineveh (eventually) following a direct command from God. His command for us today is to love our neighbours. In the Parish Profile of 2018 we put it this way: *"We serve others beyond the church because that is what Jesus did and called his followers to do."* How do we achieve a balance between showing love directly to others and making them aware of the grace of God available to them?

Looking more widely across the Old Testament, two words are used to convey something of the gracious nature of God - *hesed* (steadfast love) and *hen* meaning favour. It is the latter which is most commonly translated into the Greek χάρις (*charis*) which more directly translates as 'grace'. How does an appreciation of the breadth of this concept help us in our approach to showing grace to those we encounter?

Read Romans 5:6-11

During the 4th century – as Christianity became 'respectable' in the Roman Empire – the church had to consider the question of how much conversion should change everyday behaviours: could becoming a Christian just be a sanctified varnish to one's previous self or was deeper change required. How do we ensure that our faith gets to the heart of our actions as well as our beliefs?

In a recent interview, Stephen Cottrell (Archbishop of York) said that *"Loving your neighbour is a profoundly political statement"* also noting that, *"There's a loss of vision about what the world could be like."* He goes on to cite the way that, for example, society has come to 'accept' the scandal of homelessness and how we have learned to live with it even though solutions could be found. What difference would taking those thoughts seriously make in our lives?

Loving others often requires direct action to alleviate need – for example, our support to food banks. How do we balance this with work to remove the underlying causes such as lobbying politicians to reduce systematic poverty and other inequalities across society?

Looking back at the very end of the Jonah reading, God's concern clearly goes beyond humanity to the rest of creation (v11). How do we ensure that our actions extend grace to creation-care?

"Grace is but glory begun, and glory is but grace perfected." (Jonathan Edwards)