

Grace to Take What Comes
John 6:22-35 and Ephesians 4:1-8
1 August 2021

Three times over the past forty years I've served churches in Virginia's Tidewater region... which, I **discovered**, is much more **diverse** than one **might** suppose, looking on from, say, up here in RVA. People from all kinds of cultures and sub-cultures contribute to the area's vibe. But, if I had to name the **one** culture that **dominates** Virginia's Tidewater, I wouldn't **hesitate** to say it's the military culture. And, if I were asked to identify a **quality** that **characterizes** those who're part of that military culture, I think the word I'd **choose** is **toughness**.

People in the military take pride in their toughness – in their mental, physical, emotional toughness – in being **able** *take what comes*. And not **only** the soldiers, sailors, airmen and coasties **themselves**, but those in their **families**, too... who deal with deployments, moves, separation, military pay, and all **kinds** of uncertainties... all the time. It is a **life** that demands a **lot** from people... the **ability** to **take** it, to take what comes – or, as some would say, *true grit!*

And, speaking of **grit**... I'm reminded of a story one of my colleagues once told about a northern friend she'd invited to drive down to Atlanta to visit her. Somewhere along the way, early one morning, the friend pulled into a *classic* southern roadhouse for breakfast. And, feeling hungry, she asked for bacon, eggs and toast. And when her order came **out**, there was this lump of white stuff on the plate, as well. *What's that*, she asked the waitress. *That's grits*, the waitress answered. *Uh... I didn't order grits*. The waitress: *Honey, nobody orders grits. Grits just come*.

The **point** of the story, as my colleague drew it out, is that **that's** how it **is** with **grace**, as well. You don't **order** grace. You **can't** order grace. **God's** grace just **comes**. It just is.

So, now – let's say **you're** pretty tough. **You** have **grit**... true grit. You can **take** pretty much whatever comes. But does that **include** what comes to you **from God**? Is God's **grace** also something you can **take**? That **kind** of taking, you **might** agree, is a lot more like **accepting**... which... for **some** people... is actually a very **hard** thing to do... and maybe **especially** for tough people!

Many of us have **difficulty** accepting help or gifts from others. It's a kind of pride thing, very often. I go out to dinner with someone, and when the **check** comes, and my companion **grabs** it and says **she'll** pay for me, I feel uncomfortable. I protest. And, when I'm denied, I say, *Well, at least let me pay the tip*... trying to salvage a bit of self-respect... trying to not feel quite so **beholden** to another... or in a position of **dependence**.

Even with God... when it's **God's** gifts we're being offered... **accepting** them can cause us to feel a fair amount of discomfort. Really, **paradoxically**, it can take a lot of **effort** to “simply” accept the grace of God... to **allow** God to be God... to accept the love that saves us... to **resist** the **impulse** to try and do at least a **little** something ourselves to **earn** our way into the kingdom or to pay back the favor... so we don't feel so... what? Dependent? Incapable?

Works righteousness. I know it well! It is **tough** to be truly gracious toward God... to be gracious with God's graciousness toward us.

However, the good news is, **even if** we **stumble** in accepting God's grace **graciously**, God still extends it to us. **And** you and I **may** still **receive** it. God won't **refuse** to love and help us just **because** we accept God's gifts imperfectly. We **may** deny **ourselves** the gift of grace, but **God** will not deny us. And that truly is good news!

And, let me tell you something **else** that's good: In the **world**, our **self-respect** is usually tied to what we **do** or what we've **done**... or what we **aren't** doing or what we **haven't** done. However, **in Christ**, our self-respect is based on what **God** has done. We respect ourselves **based** on the fact that **we** are **loved** by God. Even if we don't see ourselves as particularly **worthy** of God's love... (and surely sometimes there are reasons why we might **not**)... God **chooses** to see us as those who're worthy. And I figure, if **God** does, then who am **I** to **contradict** God? Who are you? *Have some self-respect*, God says. *You are precious to me!*

And... have some **hope**. **Have** hope – not on the basis of anything **you've** done or can lay claim to, but on the grounds of your having **been claimed by God**. **Because** you have been claimed by **God** for **abundant** life, you have **reason** to hope! **And** you have grounds for **self-respect!**

You know, people **with** the self-respect and hope that Christ **inspires** really **can** take an awful **lot** that **this** world dishes out. They **also** can **offer** quite a lot **to others**. Having received through Christ grace upon grace, acceptance they didn't earn, mercies they never merited... they can themselves extend grace, acceptance and mercy to others. They can be forgiving, helpful and loving toward others... particularly when life is tough for them. They're **good** at accepting **and** giving, both... because, like those other people who, gathered around Christ close by the Sea of Galilee, were fed and satisfied... they've received from Jesus the Bread of life.

Soon, you and I will, too. We will celebrate Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper. **We** will be offered the bread of life... the cup of salvation... God's gift of himself in Christ. Do you think you can **take that**... receive it from God? Will you? Will I? Let us hope so! Brothers and sisters, I **pray** that **you** will. Pray for me, also, to be gracious enough to **take** what **comes** from the **hands** of our **Savior**, Jesus Christ... the Lord, the bread of life.