

The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 9, Year A
July 6, 2014
The Rev. Robert H. Malm

Needing Help

It is a rare Sunday when all four of our readings basically have the same theme.

In Genesis we read about Abraham needing help to find a wife for Isaac, his son. Abraham's servant finds Rebekah. She and Isaac fall in love and the family line continues.

Psalms 45 continues the marriage theme, yet the bride needs help to "*forget*" her people and leave her "*father's house*." She was from beyond Israel and now would become a Hebrew.

Continuing this summer with our readings from St. Paul's letter to the Romans, today we learn of Paul's inner conflict between doing right and doing wrong. Paul knows he needs the help of God's grace to "*rescue*" him from his torment.

Finally, Matthew's Gospel again records Jesus' teaching about discipleship. Jesus needed help from John the Baptist to begin his ministry. He went to John to be baptized. Jesus needed help from a community of disciples to carry on the ministry and mission. And as we see in Jesus' prayer in the middle of today's Gospel, Jesus needed strength from God the Father to teach, to preach, to heal.

Needing help is the common theme in all four readings.

So we might ask, how do we need help, when do we need help?

One week after my accident and surgery, I woke up on Presidents' Day Monday, February 17th, to see the sun rise from my room in Fairfax Hospital. I decided I wanted to write an all-parish email to let our parish know how much I needed help in this long process of recovery. I needed my wife, Leslie; I needed each of my children; I needed those who came to see me, bring me Holy Communion, offer prayers and support. Many weeks later, several parishioners told me how much they appreciated my emails, but most especially they told me how wonderful it was for me to write about how many people helped me in so many ways – visitors, walks, cards, prayers.

I imagine Paul had a similar sense, an even greater sense, about needing help. We read in today's epistle from Romans about his inner conflict, his need for God's grace. This was a constant issue in Paul's life. He started as Saul, persecuting Christians, consenting to their execution. Through his conversion he discovered God's grace and love. Yet all during his ministry he was persecuted, tortured, imprisoned. He knew his need of God's grace. "*Thanks be to God ... for Jesus ...*" Knowing our need for help leads us to grace.

Isn't that true for each of us? Knowing our need for God's help has led us to grace – Grace Church – the sacramental community sharing the gifts of God's grace. How often have you discovered grace, here at Grace and beyond? Grace comes to us when our need is greatest. Jesus said, "*Blessed are those who know their need of God ...*" (Matthew 5:3)

Yet we live in a doubting, self-centered culture. This is the same cultural reality that Jesus encountered and he called this culture a child-like culture, never satisfied – not satisfied with the ministry of John, not satisfied with the ministry of Jesus. Today's Gospel is really a commentary on the religious leadership of our Lord's day, the Pharisees. The Pharisees didn't understand grace; they knew only law and judgment. So, today, where do we find grace? I have certainly found it here – in this parish community – and I know many of you have as well.

Ever since the reformers began to change the Latin mass, as early as 25 years before the first *Book of Common Prayer* in 1549, verse 28 of chapter 11 from Matthew's Gospel has been read, "*Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.*" For centuries this verse was known as the first of the "comfortable words." Now this is an option for us to hear only in Rite I. This is the promise of grace.

We all need grace. We all need help. We all need each other. Discipleship leads individuals to seek community. We are a part of Grace Church because we know how much we need each other. This is the yoke Jesus talks about. The yoke is knowing how much we need each other, how much we need God. And once we know our need, the yoke is easy and the burden is light.

Genesis 24:34-38, 42-44, 58-67
Psalm 45:11-18
Romans 7:15-25a
Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30