

Please take time to stop by the silent auction today! Now, I'm going to warn you, there are a couple of **changes** in the way things are being done this year, but hopefully this won't cause too much confusion! For one thing we are just concentrating our efforts on the **Silent** Auction and not having a **Live** Auction. And for another, there are items up for auction in the first and second grade classrooms on the east end of this building in addition to all of the items in the Fellowship Center and lobby. I realize it's a lot of **change**, but that shouldn't take away from the fun and success this traditional event which benefits both the school and the church.

Speaking of change, how many Lutherans does it take to change a lightbulb? The answer: "Change? What is 'change'? We never change." I know! I admit making changes is hard for me to do and **too much** change can be very confusing!

In all seriousness though, confusion is a big problem in our world today, especially when it comes to spiritual matters. You don't have to look very hard to see it. Last Sunday during our Bible study hour, Pastor Adelsen told us about a religious cult called Scientology. Scientology is especially popular among several big name Hollywood celebrities, but has as many as 2 million followers worldwide. One of the many things followers of scientology are confused about is the existence of sin and evil in the world. There really is no such thing as sin, a scientologist will say, there are just negative events and that happen in one's life that cause negative forces, called engrams. The trick is to remove those engrams through right thinking and all will go well for you. Scientologists also teach that there are many different gods and that all religions are paths that eventually lead to salvation. This they teach even though the Bible is clear that Jesus alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the only way to God the Father. Well, there's a lot more about Scientology that we learned, but trust me, it's very confusing! And that's only **one** of the cults and world religions we looked at!

But it's not just in cults and other religions that spiritual confusion is rampant. Even within the Christian church there's a great deal of confusion. Some Christians baptize infants, others do not. Some Christians say that we are saved by God's grace alone. Others say that we are saved by a combination of God's grace, and us earning our way to heaven. Some churches say that Jesus is the only way to heaven. Others say that He is one of many options. Why all these differences? The basic problem is spiritual confusion.

Today, on this first Sunday in Lent, our goal is to sweep any confusion out of our minds and your hearts as we study the Word of God. In general, people are confused about two things, and we're going to look at those two things today. First of all, we are going to see how we are **worse** off than we think. And secondly, we are going to see how we are **better** off than we think. If you understand these two phrases, and how they fit together, your confusion will disappear.

So, how bad off are we? "Well, I don't think I'm all that bad." A person might say, "In fact, my life is just fine! Sure, I've got a few problems here and there, but nothing too serious." But look at verse 12 of our text: "Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to **all** men, because all sinned." (NIV) The Bible says that you, and all people, have been poisoned with sin. How bad is that?

The Bible says that at the beginning of time, everything was better than "just fine", it was perfect and pure. But then sin entered the world and poisoned the human heart. We heard about how that happened in our Old Testament reading today. And this didn't just happen to Adam and Eve – it happened to all mankind, including you. Your heart and mine have been infected with sin and that changes us into enemies of God.

"Well that can't be," people say. "Look at my children – they're very cute and sweet. They're being brought up in a good way." And while that may very well be true, isn't it interesting that if you put just one toy into a room with two children, they will fight over that toy. "Mine!" one of them says. "No, mine!" the other says. One child pushes the other. One child bashes the other over the head with a Tonka truck. Why? Even though they're cute, have good parents, their hearts, and the hearts of all people, have been poisoned with sin.

Most people have no idea. "We don't need to baptize that child until he is older," people say. "I don't feel sinful. I feel fine." But we're worse off than we think. This verse tells us that sin came to all people, and along with sin, death.

Sin is what causes your body to age and wear out. Sin is why all people eventually die. And ultimately, if not treated, sin causes a person to go to hell after they die. According to the Bible, we're much worse off than we think. Once you understand the real problem each one of us has, some of your confusion begins to disappear. And that's when you turn to God and ask him for help.

What is the solution to this problem? The solution can be summed up in one word, "grace." The word "grace" pops up again and again in this section.

The word “grace” is an interesting one in the Bible – most people don’t understand it, even though they sing and talk about it all the time.

First of all, how much does grace cost? I think most people are confused about this issue. Most people don’t realize how generous God really is. Unbelievers think that God is stingy. “God doesn’t give you anything for free,” they say. “You have to earn it yourself. Trust in yourself. Roll up your sleeves and get to work. Nothing in this world is free.” Christians are confused about God’s grace, as well. Many, many Christians talk about God’s grace, but they believe it’s something you have to earn. “God isn’t going to give you His grace for free,” some Christians say. “You need to start volunteering more, helping out more, if you want God to be good to you. You better roll up your sleeves and get to work, if you want God to forgive you and love you.”

But we’re better off than we think, and the reason why is because God is more generous than we think. Verse 15 tells us, “For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the *grace* of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!”(NIV)

The Greek word for “grace” means “undeserved, unearned love.” Yes, God’s grace is 100 percent a gift. And a gift, as you know, is free – otherwise it wouldn’t be a gift. God’s grace doesn’t cost you anything. And when you open that gift, you find out that it’s exactly what you need – the forgiveness of sins, the sure promise of eternal life in heaven, the sure promise that you will someday live beyond the grave. This gift comes to you through Jesus Christ. He earns it, by living a perfectly flawless life, and giving you the credit. He earns it by taking the blame for your sins on the cross, dying in your place. He earns it by rising from the dead as proof that this gift is real and belongs to you.

Yes, you are much better off than you think, because God is much more generous than you or I could ever imagine. This verse describes God’s giving as “overflowing.” Imagine being at a restaurant, God’s restaurant, and the reason you are there is because you have heard about this amazing thing called grace that God gives. Sure enough – there it is on the menu. Right behind it, there is the description: “Unearned, undeserved, unending love.” “That’s what I need,” you say to yourself. And sure enough, the menu says it’s free – God’s giving it away.

God Himself comes to your table and takes your order. “And just how much grace would you like,” He asks you. “Well, I think a cup of grace will do,” you say. After all, the menu says that a cup of grace is enough to forgive a lifetime of sins, and your sinful nature. “Yes, a cup of grace will do just fine,” you say.

But God's grace overflows. God comes back to your table, and asks you to follow Him. He leads you through the restaurant and out the back and somehow, in a miraculous way, you find yourself in front of an endless ocean. "I know you only need a cup of grace," God says. "But I'm going to give you this ocean. There is more than enough grace here to pay for a lifetime of sins a million times over. I'm giving this all to you for free, because I love you."

That's what the Bible means when it says that God's grace overflows to the many. You need a cup of grace, but God gives you an ocean. He is more generous than you could ever imagine, and that is why you're better off than you'll probably ever know.

Don't let confusion clutter up your heart this Lenten season. Never forget that sin is in your heart. But even more importantly, never forget that in Christ God forgives you more generously than you could ever know. And that will never change! Thanks be to God! Amen.