**RECONCILING GRACE**

**Mr. Jack Hott**

**Mar 30-31, 2019**

Outline

Brief introduction including description of opportunities through certified lay servant, lay speaker and certified lay minister; also Stephen Ministers program.

In addition to Luke and 2 Corinthians, the lectionary has an old testament lesson from Joshua.

Brief history about Joshua

1. Events that took place around 1250 to 1225 B.C. but not formally written down until around 625 to 600 D.C.
2. The stories are full of God’s direct presence through mighty acts performed through chosen human instruments. These books about the early times in the history of God’s people in Canaan the lands now known as Israel and the nations show the active role of God when people follow God’s commandments and what happens when they don’t.
3. The Hebrew strategy in the conquest of the region was to conquer strategic centers while by-passing other strongholds. Eventually settling in this promised land either defeating individual tribes or just settling down side-by-side with the Canaanites.
4. Joshua being at the death of Moses. Remember God said Israel would not enter the promised land until all those who came out of Egypt had died. God chose Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ minister to lead the people into the Promised Land which began by crossing the river Jordan. Hear Joshua 5: 1-12

### *The New Generation Circumcised*

*5 1 When all the kings of the Amorites beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the Israelites until they had crossed over, their hearts melted, and there was no longer any spirit in them, because of the Israelites.*

*2At that time the Lord said to Joshua, “Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites a second time.” 3So Joshua made flint knives, and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath-haaraloth.[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Joshua+5&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-5938a)*] 4This is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the warriors, had died during the journey through the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt. 5Although all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people born on the journey through the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised. 6For the Israelites traveled forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the warriors who came out of Egypt, perished, not having listened to the voice of the Lord. To them the Lord swore that he would not let them see the land that he had sworn to their ancestors to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. 7So it was their children, whom he raised up in their place that Joshua circumcised; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way.*

*8When the circumcising of all the nation was done, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. 9The Lord said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt.” And so that place is called Gilgal[*[*b*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Joshua+5&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-5944b)*] to this day.*

### *The Passover at Gilgal*

*10While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. 11On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. 12The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.*

1. A BIG CHANGE has taken place! No longer held by the reproach of Egypt, Israel begins a new life in a new land. HOWEVER, there was a down side to it. The kings of the Amorites and the Canaanites knew they faced a big change in their lives and they weren’t happy about it. In fact, the Book of Joshua next moves to the fall of Jericho.

Brief history on 2 Corinthians

1. Corinth was a Greek city/colony founded probably under Julius Caesar settled by former Roman soldiers along with Greeks and Oriental people creating a very cosmopolitan city which included many Jews. It was an “intermodal” transfer point where cargo was transferred from ships to land then across the land and reloaded onto ships. It was the center of pagan religions and distractions. There was an ancient proverb that said, “Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth”.
2. Paul was the first recorded Christian missionary in Greece. In Corinth Paul’s converts were Gentiles who were attracted to Jewish monotheism, but their status was as gentiles to the synagogue. However, there were some important members of the local synagogue who did come over. Very mixed group of followers with different backgrounds, beliefs and traditions.
3. Both books (first and second Corinthians) struggle with a divided church. These divides included leadership, acceptance of Paul’s leadership vs. other more traditional leaders from Jerusalem, and the mixing of local pagan thinking and early Christian thinking.
4. In our lesson starting at verse 16, Paul shares and declares the change that he and all Christians must experience*. “From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view, even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation . . .”*
5. Paul makes it clear that our mission is reconciling grace.
6. A BIG CHANGE has taken place, but divisions remain that must be reconciled

THE PRODIGAL SON

1. This section of Luke includes a series of parables. The first is the parable of the lost sheep. The second is the parable of the lost coin. Both demonstrate the great joy in heaven over one that was lost is now found.
2. The third is the prodigal son. This parable contains a more complicated set of themes that make it a deeper more enlighten set of lessons.
3. Eldest son is favored; gets 2/3 of the inheritance while the younger son get 1/3.
4. Prodigal means reckless extravagant; characterized by wasteful expenditure
5. We know what he did with the money
6. Again, this parable demonstrates the God’s overwhelming acceptance of a returning soul
7. But, let’s look at the two brothers for a moment
8. Younger brother; did he really repent? No, he was thinking about himself VERSE 14 – 19.

*When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ So he set off and went to his father.*

1. He was thinking about himself and meeting what he saw as his immediate needs.
2. What the younger brother received was overwhelming and was meant as a message to us about how gracious God’s love can be if we are just will to accept it. I wonder if the younger son could remain so self-centered upon this overwhelming welcome home.
3. NOW the older brother; all these years I have slaved for you! I’ve done everything right but you NEVER gave ME a young goat and celebration!!! He too was thinking about himself
4. Last week Pastor Amy told the story of Billy Graham’s speeding ticket. As I listened to how this was like the parables of people confessing their sins (like the prodigal son) and how God’s love spills over. But, what if I looked at it this way . . .
5. He got off because he is successful and famous. It isn’t fair!
6. Can you think of other times where this has happened even in the church? Some else gets to sit at the head of the table, someone else is asked to be the committee chair, another group gets to use the space displacing others, someone else got to drive the Bishop to the next church (if it was a DS no big deal but the Bishop! Don’t tell Todd or Suzanne I said that) I’m so upset I just might text or even Twitter about it!

Now in the parable VERSE 31-32. *Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”*

1. Maybe we just need to GET OVER IT! Stop and ask ourselves what does this have to do with *making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the World*? Making disciples certainly is about outreach to others, but in this case I know I need to work on making this one disciple a better disciple! Outreach to ourselves!

BRINGING THIS TOGETHER ON RECONCILING GRACE

1. All three of the bible lessons we have looked at involve big changes; the Hebrew people crossing the Jordon into the Promised Land, the people of the church in Corinth transformed to provide reconciling grace as new people in Christ, and the joy of the return of a wayward son. Yet in all three there is a down! Division that needs to be reconciled.
2. We as a church are called to be (from 2 Corinthians) “ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God”
3. As you can see, division and reconciliation is nothing new in our two-thousand year old religion or in our 250 year old Wesleyan tradition.
4. In my research for this “class meeting” an old Wesleyan term, I came across an abstract from a John Wesley sermon it said, “In the matter of division on basis of doctrine”, Wesley found a solution, as explained in his famous sermon “The Catholic Spirit”:
	1. Wesley believed that the only way for the church to be unified was to learn how to distinguish between essentials and nonessentials, discover how to accept our differences in the nonessentials, and then decide not to let the differences overshadow our common faith. He believed love and commitment to Jesus were essential. Everything else was simply nonessential. He did not mean unimportant; he meant that those things “should not divide us.”
5. While looking at quotations from John Wesley I discovered one that I have used for years and never knew it came from him! “Agree to disagree” first appeared in print in 1770 in a memorial sermon he wrote upon the death of George Whitefield.
	1. Whitefield like Wesley as an Anglican theologian.
	2. Whitefield was a Calvinist believing in predestination – the idea that God chose who would follow Him and He would draw those people to Himself.
	3. Wesley was a Arminian who focused on free will – individuals could choose whether to believe in the Christian faith, and opposed the absolute predestination of strict Calvinism and maintaining the possibility of salvation for all
	4. To illustrate this division and how Wesley addressed it, I came across this story:
	5. One day after Whitefield’s death, John Wesley was timidly approached by one of the godly band of Christian sisters who had been brought under his influence and who loved both Whitefield and himself:
		1. Dear Mr. Wesley, may I ask you a question?
		2. Yes, of course, madam, by all means
		3. But, dear Mr. Wesley, I am very much afraid what the answer will be.
		4. Well, madam, let me hear your question, and then you will know my reply.
		5. At last after not a little hesitation, the inquirer tremblingly asked, “Dear Mr. Wesley, do you expect to see dear Mr. Whitefield in heaven?
		6. A lengthy pause followed, after which John Wesley replied with great seriousness, “No, madam”. His inquirer at once exclaimed, “Ah, I was afraid you would say no”.
		7. To which John Wesley added, with intense earnestness, “Do not misunderstand me, madam; George Whitefield was so bright a star in the firmament of God’s glory, and will stand so near the throne, that on like me, who am less than the least, will never catch a glimpse of him”
	6. Finally, I wish to share with you a quote from I book that was recommended to me as a teenager by a minister at First Community Church in Columbus, Ohio, that has had a great influence on my faith life. The book is *The Christian Agnostic* by Leslie D. Weatherhead, a Englishman and, like John Wesley, Anglican theologian. Weatherhead was a prolific (but controversial) author/preacher in the middle part of the last century. Like 1965 (makes me feel old to put it that way). Quoting Leslie Weatherhead:
		1. The essential in Christianity, past, present and future, is loving Christ and one another, and if the Quaker finds god in the silence and the Salvation Army in the band, the Roman Catholic in the Mass and the Baptist in immersion;
		2. If the High Anglican likes incense and ceremonial, and the Methodist puts his emphasis on personal experience, the fellowship of the authentic class meeting and Charles Wesley’s hymns, why talk of disunity?
		3. The Air Force, Navy and the Army can all serve the Queen, and, in the churches, what matters most is the love of Christ, tolerances of one another and a passionate togetherness against every form of evil.

I ask you to consider what is essential in lives of our church and its members. Please take the time to ponder on how was can focus on the most essential and how to cope with each other on the nonessential.

I will close by saying as our congregation’s lay member at annual conference the past two years, I’m reminded of the theme’s that our bishop has set: 2017 “Be not afraid, God is with us”; 2018 “Be not afraid, there is enough” (that would be a good subtitle for today’s message); and for this year “Be not afraid – HOPE”

Amen

BENEDICTION:

I am borrowing from a writing of John Wesley. It was written in first person, but for this benediction I am using third person that we may all be included:

[Lord, we are no longer our own, but Yours. Put us to what You will, rank us with whom You will. Let us be employed by You or laid aside for You, exalted for You or brought low by You. Let us have all things, let us have nothing, we freely and heartily yield all things to Your pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, You are ours and we are Yours. So be it. Amen.](https://www.azquotes.com/quote/1316821)