

**First Presbyterian Church
Southampton, New York
“Remember to Say Grace!”**

Romans 5:1 – 5

**Trinity Sunday
Confirmation Sunday**

May 22, 2016

One of the longstanding traditions in my family, is saying grace before every meal... you know, just taking a few moments to acknowledge God’s providence for the food before us, and to thank Him for giving it. And, depending on what we’re having, and who cooked it, praying that we won’t be poisoned by it! Which, I admit, may not be a particularly great spiritual accomplishment... I mean, “saying grace” is pretty low-impact as Christian disciplines go, and I’m sure that many of you also say grace, if not before *every* meal, at least some of the time. It’s just kind of what Christians do, right?

But we tended to make a bigger than usual deal out of it, and especially as our kids were growing up. Because, we always felt that, simple as it was, saying grace was a good and easy way to remind ourselves of God’s grace, and God’s providence, and the fact that God was present with us in our lives that day. And, of course, those are very important things to keep in mind.

And so, over the years, we went through the whole progression of different “graces” that many families like to use. I mean, we had our “*God is great, God is good, and we thank Him for our food...*” phase. And under the influence of some humorous grandparental prodding, we went through a “*Over the teeth and through the gums, look out stomach here it comes!*” phase. During summer church camp years, we had a robust phase of “*Thank you, Lord, for giving us food! Thank you, Lord, for giving us food! Thank you Creator! Thank you Redeemer! Thank you Sustainer! Amen!*”

Of course, whenever our Catholic friends joined us for dinner, we shifted to the familiar “*Bless us O Lord and these thy gifts which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ our Lord, amen. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Mother Mary pray for us sinners... and so on.*” And, eventually, we cycled into our current phase of more or less “adult” type graces, like “*Lord, bless the food before us; may it nourish and strengthen us; and watch over our friends and family; amen.*” (And deliver us from ptomaine poisoning. Amen.)

All of which is very nice, and very cool, and very painless; except when we went *out* to dinner somewhere. Because the deal was, you see, we didn’t say grace just at *home*; we had to say it in the restaurant, too... which was usually fine, but it could be a little touch-and-go sometimes; because you didn’t want the waitress to come walking up to the table with your food, while everyone’s holding hands around the table praying! So, we’d be, like, “*Okay, quick! Somebody pray before she comes back with the mashed potatoes! Anita! Keep one eye open, in case she walks to the table and we don’t hear her! Sylvia! Keep it short! Just pray for the food and not the entire extended family!*”

Anyway, I've always been a fan of "saying grace;" because, by doing this short and simple act, we remember **God's** grace; we call to mind **God's** love; and we remind ourselves to whom it is that **we** belong, as Christian disciples. And, although the context wasn't a before-meal grace, our biblical text from Romans this morning was making the same basic point... as Paul reminded his fellow believers in Rome that: "*Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.*"

"*We have peace with God,*" Paul is saying; "*and we are no longer at odds with Him. We've been blessed with a meaningful and hope-filled life... because of the grace which He has freely given, and which we've found through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*" According to Paul, the Romans, and by extension, all of us Christians, live every day in the loving presence of Almighty God. God is **with us**, in other words; and because He is, we can have hope, even on our most difficult days... and we can trust that our Lord will do great things with us, if we will only let Him.

At the end of the day, **that's** what we remember... with our little words of grace around the dinner table. And that's what I want our **Confirmands** to remember... as they take their place as full-fledged members of this great church family; and begin, in a new and wonderful way, their lives as Christian disciples.

I want you guys to remember that, no matter what great accomplishments you go on to realize in the lives that are before you... and I know that you **will** realize many, many great accomplishments; I want you to remember that, what makes you great, what makes you important, what makes you genuinely special... **isn't** your accomplishments; it's the God who made you, and who loves you, and who's given His grace to you, to bring you to this day. Each and every one of you; each and every one of us; is of infinite worth to our Heavenly Father. In God's eyes, you, and all the rest of us, are more valuable than anything else in the universe. And for no other reason than just being who you are.

And, you've got to remember that! Because this world is going to tell you constantly that you only matter because of what you've done, or what you own, or where you live, or who you know. Your value, in the eyes of this world, is going to be determined by how well, or how poorly, you measure up to other people... so you can only be great, if there are others around you who aren't so great. This world will invite you to join in the hopeless quest for status, and prestige, and esteem in the eyes of other people; as if those things alone can give you a life that's really worth living. Well, they can't; and they won't.

But your Heavenly Father, through the grace of your Lord Jesus, absolutely **will** give you a life worth living! And He will give you that life no matter what you go on to do in the future; and no matter how far up the food chain of worldly success you ascend; and whether or not you're a "somebody" or a "nobody" in the community pecking order! God loves you, period. Jesus walks every day with you, period. And your heart, and your soul, and your life will never be beyond the loving care of our Lord. Period!

So, **Eli Halsey**: you may win an NCAA cross-country championship someday; or, you may play tennis in the U.S. Open. Or maybe you'll commandeer your parents' farm stand, turn it into a laboratory, and develop broccoli that tastes like peanut butter, and asparagus that glows in the dark! But, Eli, wherever your future takes you, remember that you stand on the grace of God in your Lord Jesus Christ; and that you are now, and will forever be, His greatly beloved child!

and win the first American Olympic marathon gold medal since 1972; or maybe you'll make your Grandpa happy, and play soccer for the Southampton Saints, in the English Premier League! But, Ben, wherever your future takes you, remember that you stand on the grace of God in your Lord Jesus Christ; and that you are now, and will forever be, His greatly beloved child!

Confirmands, you guys have done a great job... and it's been a real joy to me to be your teacher. And I know I speak for the whole church family when I say that we're very proud of you, and happy for you! And I look forward to sharing the life of discipleship with you... to learning *with* you, and *from* you; to going out into this world together, and making a difference for good, in Jesus' name.

And as you... and I... and all the rest of this wonderful church family go out and make that difference for good, let's always remember that we stand upon the grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ, and that we are, always, and will forever be, His greatly beloved children! And don't you ever forget it!

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen!