



“Enter, the grace of God”

BY PASTOR JOHN HILLMER

And so it begins! We enter the season of Lent. Another “springtime” in the church. A time of stretching, and training our spiritual muscles; it is a time of putting good **spiritual practices** into place. It’s a time of **focus**, of **intentionality**; of keeping our ‘eye on the ball’. It’s a time of **being mindful** of the presence of God. Last Wednesday – Ash Wednesday – we were marked with the Cross of Christ, as we embarked upon our journey.

Today – the 1st Sunday of this season - we hear again how God ‘**enters**’ the arena of human life.

- He entered -- the “water” (baptism).
- He entered - the “wilderness” (time of trial & testing).
- He entered - the time of “witness” (his public ministry).

The time is fulfilled! The Kingdom of God has come near! Believe it; it’s Good news!

What an entrance!

“Enter the grace of God.”

This has a double meaning. Any Thespian knows the terminology – you do it when blocking the script.

ENTER – stage left or EXIT – stage right. And “timing is everything”.

First, God ‘enters’ the drama of human history and timing is everything. God ‘enters’ in the most unexpected circumstances, and at the most surprising times, but it’s always right on que!

Let's look at our Scriptures.

In the Old Testament there is the "Flood". Destruction is everywhere. Remember when Hurricane "Harvey" hit Houston? Now take it to a power of #10! It was when the flood hit, that God says "Never again". "And when you see a rainbow in the sky, it's a sign of my covenant; my promise; to be with you and all living flesh." That's a promise more durable and dependable than FEMA.

*But "timing is everything" don't you see. When catastrophe hits: ENTER, the grace of God. In the Wilderness -- Enter the grace of God. Jesus was being tested with trials and temptations. The scripture says the Spirit of God, and the angels were with him. Timing is everything. Enter the grace of God. On the cross; Enter the grace of God.

God's grace comes in the most unexpected circumstances; the most surprising times.

Second, WE, Children of God 'enter in' to God's grace at various times occasions in our life of faith.

- In our baptisms.
- In our prayers, and confessions.
- In our seeking, and searching.
- In our finding, our falling and our failing.

Perhaps, most of all in our failures, we can find God and Enter the Grace of God.

The Psalms are prayers.

In Psalm 25 we hear, "**To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul**".

It's a prayer with an action to it. It's not just a pretty sentiment, with a nice thought to it. **Lift it up!** Just like before coming to the Lord's Table in Holy Communion: "*The Lord be with you. And also with you. Lift up your hearts. We LIFT THEM to the Lord.*"

We need the "practice", "intentionality", the "try factor". That's why we have Lent - "Spring Training" in the church. "Spring Training" in baseball is back to the basics: stretching, running, throwing, and catching. Same thing with our faith, our spiritual health. We go to the basics: prayer, fasting, works of kindness, meditation/devotion, alms-giving and confession. There is one more - trials & tribulations.

Thank you Brother Martin (today, on the church calendar the church commemorates Martin Luther. He died on this day in 1546. Feb. 18). Martin taught a "3-fold approach": Oratio (prayer), Meditatio (meditation) and Tentatio (trials) in the making of a strong Christian.

"Prayer" we know. Meditation" we may know. But tentatio – the "trials" the "proving ground", this is the touchstone. It teaches you not only to know and understand but also to experience God's grace. There IS a Lutheran spirituality. Oh you can 'read the book'; but it's less about the book, and more about the practice. And there are strong parallels to "Ignatian Spirituality". In "making a practice" of our faith, we "Enter in, to the Grace of God". Faith is not just a 'mind game' or a mental experience. It must be put into practice.

"Time is fulfilled" (It's time).

"The Kingdom of God has come near."

"Repent – and believe in the good news." Turn - believe the good news!

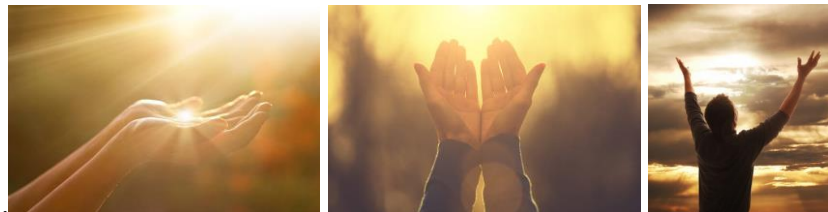
I say this often. - you've heard me after 17 years - "REPENT" is one of the most misunderstood words, there IS! It is NOT a feeling. It is not an emotional word; a word of sorrow, guilt, or shame. It's not really a cognitive word like "You should really KNOW BETTER!" "**Repent**" is an action word. It means "TO TURN" or to "RE-TURN".

"Turn – and believe the GOOD news" (Mark 1:15). You may be turned toward the Senate ("Roman Senate"). You may be turned toward there and oriented, but Jesus says "the kingdom of God is near. Turn and believe some GOOD news.

It is to TURN, from ONE orientation to ANOTHER. Walking down 'one path" and you turn to walk down another. Or maybe you were ON the path and somehow got off if so you RE-TURN. That's all it is. Often it's the Road Less Traveled, and it can make all the difference.

Closing with a prayer, with a "turning prayer" or a "Body Prayer". Yes – it's the 1st Sunday in Lent. "Spring Training. We need to 'engage' – 'stretch' – 'exercise' - 'practice' the basics of faith and do a little something different! So we're going to pray and NOT say a word. Work-out; "Spring Training" right??!!

Take your hands and hold them together, palms open in front of you. Now place into them your prayer. Now Lift - *to you O Lord I lift up my soul* - your palms upward, over your head. Release your prayer and let your hands slowly return



Amen.