

# Walking ON in Grace

## James 5:19-20

### Introduction

As I understand the story, our congregation was founded nearly 109 years ago when a seminary student at nearby Hamma Theological Seminary on the campus of Wittenberg University decided that our town needed a new Lutheran church on the expanding northside of the city. A small house on Grube Street was the chosen location for this new church start.

Those of us today know Grube Street as that small little road that runs off Home Road at Lees Chicken, goes passed Little Caesars and Dhingra Orthodontics before dumping into the parking lot of O'Connors Irish Pub. But in 1915 Grube Street was essentially the northern boundary of Springfield, running east and west from Limestone Street toward Plum Street. Following the death of President Warren Harding in 1923, Grube Street was renamed in honor of the deceased President and became Harding Road. The Grube Street name was assigned to its present location.

Let me ask you this ...

Why in a city of Lutheran Churches would anyone consider starting yet one more Lutheran Church?

By the time Grace was started, our community was populated with a number of Lutheran congregations. The first was – you guessed it – First Lutheran. Within the 25 years after it was founded, as Springfield continued to grow, colonies of members from First Lutheran left to start other new Lutheran congregations in town. Second Lutheran was next, followed by Third Lutheran, Fourth Lutheran, Fifth Lutheran, and Calvary. First Lutheran also provided leadership and assistance in the establishment of Trinity, St. Mark, Auburn, and finally Grace.

Again, I ask ...

With all of those Lutheran Churches, why start another one? What could Springfield possibly need with another Lutheran Church?

Fast forward to the year 1999, to the occasion we come to celebrate today. Why would Grace congregation decide to walk 1.1 miles west down Harding Road into a former corn field, leaving behind a building where 84 years of history and ministry had occurred? 84 years ...

There are all the practical answers of course. Things like ...

- A need for more parking
- Handicapped accessibility
- And a host of other practical, business related issues like these.

All important. Everyone of them.

But I want to remind you this morning as we celebrate our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in this space, that there is another far more important reason for the decisions made in 1915 and 1999, and for every decision made in the 84 years between those two dates, and in the years since we relocated here.

What was that reason? You have no doubt heard it expressed like this:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

From our earliest days to this present day, the heartbeat of this congregation is the Great Commission. We were FOUNDED ... We MOVED ... and we continue to MINISTER because people need to know Jesus. People from every generation need to know and experience ...

- Forgiveness of sin
- An abundant life
- The promise of heaven.

All wrapped up in a single word that was chosen to be our congregational name:

GRACE

About 20 years after Jesus returned to heaven, His biological brother James wrote a letter to ...

To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations (James 1:1)

... Jewish Christians who had been forced to leave their homes because of the intense persecution they had faced in Jerusalem. He wrote to a people ...

- Now forced to live in communities that did not share the same faith values they had.
- Now exposed to a host of other religious thoughts and philosophies.
- They weren't necessarily persecuted in their new homes like they had been in Jerusalem, but their new neighbors were not necessarily eager to convert and become followers of Jesus either.
- And the temptations to experiment with other faith traditions were very real.

So James wrote a wonderfully practical book of faith. The Epistle of James is not deep theology, but is filled with helpful hints for practical living in an unchristian environment. He concluded his epistle with words that should continue to echo in this congregation that has been driven to help people WALK ON IN GRACE.

My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins. (James 5:19-20)

Let me make two observations:

### **OBSERVATION #1: THE TRUTH MATTERS**

... if one of you should wander from the truth ... (James 5:19)

In our community right now, "truth" is an important word. Politicians and people alike are trying to convince one another about what is "truth."

When Jesus stood trial before the Roman governor, Pilate asked:

"What is truth?" retorted Pilate. (John 18:38)

As a general rule, we associate "truth" with "facts." In court, we are told to "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." It is the facts that the jury wants to hear.

But in the Bible, is not a fact. It is a person.

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

It would not be a stretch to read James 5:19 like this:

... if one of you should wander from the truth (Jesus Christ) ... (James 5:19)

Robert Robinson was a rather difficult, headstrong boy, and when his father died, things only got worse for his mother. So, when Robinson turned 14 years old, his mother sent him to London for an apprenticeship.

To no one's surprise, he was just as much a troublemaker in London, and to make matters worse he gained some friends and followers and ended up as the leader of a gang.

When he was 17, he took his gang to a revival service where a well-known preacher at the time, George Whitfield, was speaking. They intended to disrupt the revival service ... ..But something happened that night that Robert wasn't expecting...

After hearing the message, it moved him deeply and it made him rethink his life and how he was living it. Nearly three years after hearing that sermon, a twenty-year-old

Robert Robinson made his peace with God, and “found full and free forgiveness through the precious blood of Jesus Christ.”

He felt the call to ministry and was appointed by John Wesley himself to the Calvinist Methodist Chapel in Norfolk, England. It was there, on the third anniversary of his conversion, he penned the words of this hymn: “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” One of the verses reads like this:

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,  
Prone to leave the God I love;  
Here’s my heart, O take and seal it,  
Seal it for Thy courts above.

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Grace does not exist simply to exist. We are called to bring people to the truth – to Jesus. Only He is truth. And whether people have wandered away or never met Jesus before, we help people make the connection.

## **OBSERVATION #2: OUR MISSION MATTERS**

Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins. (James 5:20)

Over the 17 years I have been a part of this congregation, you have heard me ask on numerous occasions a question like this:

If Grace (and churches like Grace) stop telling people about Jesus, who will do it?

And I usually go on to say, that if Grace stops feeding the hungry or building houses for the homeless, some other organization will do it. You see that all across our world. Christians are not the only ones who do those things.

But if Christians don’t tell people about Jesus, who will? The politicians? The Kiwanis? The United Way? Who?

In this concluding verse of his epistle, James emphasizes the consequences of failing to spread the good news:

People will never experience forgiveness and will face eternity apart from God.

## **APPLICATION**

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And so we WALK ON with this never ending message.

We all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Romans 3:23)

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
(Romans 6:23)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

For the 109 years of our existence, for the 25 years of ministry in this location, our message remains the same.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Amen.