

Faced with a choice between the Gospel passage and Pauline theology in Romans Chapter 5, most preachers would probably opt for the Gospel text. But this time a phrase in the Romans reading caught my eye:

“We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand”.

This grace in which we stand.

Saint Paul uses the word grace in Greek - *charis* - 24 times in his letter to the Romans. It's one of his main themes. A few years ago the art critic and historian Brian Sewell visited a series of pilgrimage sites in France before embarking on the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage route in Northern Spain, perhaps the most famous in the world.

He starts out full of self-confidence and cynicism but after Lourdes in South-west France his approach changes, and by the time he gets to Santiago de Compostela, on the feast of Saint James, he finds himself overwhelmed, at one point trying to avoid the camera that's trying to film him.

Something profound is clearly going on and it's taken him by surprise; he is, for once, lost for words.

The writer Marilynne Robinson has observed that a theology of grace is a higher realism. It enables us to see the love behind everything. Maybe that's what Brian Sewell was glimpsing in those moments. It happens. It's always a gift that comes surprisingly. It is to experience the greatest kindness. A space where self-justification is rendered entirely redundant.

And like Mary, the mother of Jesus, it will take your life in another direction. Grace defines the way that God is, and out of grace faith is born. Again. And again. And again. We have obtained access to this grace in which we stand.

The text carries the sense that Jesus has ushered us into the very presence of God; as someone as someone into a greater presence. We have been put right; reconciled, and here we are standing in a state of grace.

Paul understands the whole movement of the Christian life from beginning to end and indeed beyond the end; in terms of grace it is the very air that we breathe.

He left his Father's throne above so free so infinite,
His grace emptied himself of all but love and bled for
Adam's helpless race.

His mercy all immense and free for oh my god it found
out me.

Grace: God's free and unmerited favour. It dreams the cosmos and you into being, to find our fulfilment in fruitful relationship with God and each other.

In Jesus, full of grace and truth, as Saint John puts it. God shows us a world where grace restores, and reintegrates, and forgives; key word that.

The walls of gender, age, ethnicity; all crumble in the face of grace. Grace remakes the world at Pentecost; residents of the Middle East, Europe, and Africa, find themselves sharing joy together and this new community of the risen Jesus adopts the economics of grace.

This is the world that we were born for. In the words of Tom Wright this is what truly human existence ought to be like. And that it is something so big, so massive, so unimaginably beautiful and powerful, that we almost burst as we think of it. Grace remakes a broken world and this is the project that Jesus is inviting all disciples, through all time, to be part of.

Of course, as Christians, we're constantly reminded of this grace, in which we stand, by our baptism and Holy Communion. We feed on grace; we are drenched in grace; grace never stops coming, because even when the going gets tough, and Paul knew a lot about that, grace works to redeem our experience; suffering

produces endurance; endurance produces character; character produces hope; and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts, through the Holy Spirit, that has been given to us.

Grace never ends. This grace in which we stand.