

*Amazing Grace*  
**Galatians 1: 11-24**  
**June 10, 2007**  
**First Federated Church**  
**Peoria, Illinois**  
**The Rev. Dr. Forrest “Frosty” Krummel, Jr.**

One of my biggest regrets as a father is that I was a Pharisee when it came to playing the board game *LIFE* with my youngest daughter. She used to love to play that game with me but she wasn't a real stickler to the rules. We began at start with little plastic cars and would end at the mansion, but in between she played pretty loose with the rules. She didn't do it in a cheating sort of way. It's just that she found them to be a little restrictive. She wanted the adventure of *Life* while I, on the other hand, wanted to play by the rules. As a consequence of this different approach to the game, we simply quit playing and for that, I am the poorer.

I got to thinking about that little blip in my life as I read this morning's Scripture lesson and I realized that I *like* rules. I am not alone. All of *like* rules. If we didn't, we would create so many of them.

**For example, this is one volume of the Illinois State code from 1973!** It is part of a seven volume set. An attorney friend told me that the most current state code runs to about 10 volumes because we've passed more laws! The state of Illinois is not alone, though. I hate to imagine how many volumes it takes for the Federal legal code.

**The people who wrote the Bible liked rules, too.** The third book of the Bible, Leviticus, takes 27 chapters to “explain” the *Ten Commandments!*

**I must admit that I have a love-hate relationship with rules and laws.** When I drove to a ballroom dance last night in Milan I was glad that we have rules as to which side of the road we can drive on. It would have been scary to have someone traveling east on the westbound lane of I 74 or 80! Rules are necessary if we are to live together. When they are serving their purpose they are tools that can help build a community. Most people forget that the 10 Commandments were given to the Hebrews as a sign of grace. They had been slaves for generations. Someone told them where to live, what to eat, what time to get up, what time to go to bed, whom to marry. They did not know *how* to live as free people so God, through Moses, gave them the 10 Commandments saying, essentially, if you follow these ten guidelines you'll do just fine as a free people. Unfortunately, the ten rules developed into the whole book of Leviticus!

Sometimes, though, rules can be used as an excuse not to do the things that we really should do. Sometimes they become an obstacle to doing good. Sometimes we allow *rules* to *ruin relationships!* That is essentially what I did when it came to playing the game of *LIFE* with my daughter. The rules got in the way of that one aspect of our relationship.

Jesus also had a love-hate relationship with rules. He told his listeners, *Do not think that I have come to destroy or set aside the Law. I have come to fulfill the Law.* Yet, he also criticized the Pharisees when they questioned him regarding with whom he ministered. *You hypocrites, he said, you are so good at keeping the Law; tithing mint and dill and cumin, all the while ignoring the far more important things of God like seeking righteousness.* And on another occasion, when his disciples were criticized for picking

grain on the Sabbath he reminded his critics that *the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath*. In other words, God created the Sabbath to give people relief from with work. God did *not* create people to keep the Sabbath holy.

There is always a tension between Law and Grace. But the fulcrum upon which the two can be balanced is Love. *Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful, arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way, it is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrong. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things (I Corinthians 13: 4, selected)*

When Jesus was asked what is the great commandment he replied saying, *You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, your mind and your soul*. But he didn't stop there. He tied an addendum on to it. *And you shall love your neighbor as yourself*.

"Who is my neighbor?" someone asked.

Jesus replied with what we know as the story of *The Good Samaritan*. *A man was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was set upon by robber. He was beaten, stripped and left by the side of the road for dead. A priest came walking down the road and when he saw the man lying by the road he quickly crossed over to the other side. A little while later a Levite passed by and when he saw the man laying on the side of the road, he too passed by. Finally, a Samaritan came by. When he saw the man, he had compassion upon him. He treated his wounds, put him on his beast and took him to an inn. Once there he told the innkeeper to watch after the man promising to repay the innkeeper whatever the keeper would spend upon him.*

*Who, Jesus asked, acted as neighbor to him?*

*The one who treated him* his listeners replied.

*Go and do likewise.*

Jesus was saying that a neighbor is anyone we meet who is in need. What we do not always understand in that story is that the Pharisee and the Levite were simply following the Law when they avoided the injured man. Had they come into physical contact with a dead body they would have had to be in a kind of quarantine. They would not have been able to fulfill their civic and religious duties. They were not *bad* men. According to Leviticus and the tradition of their culture, they were *prevented* from ministering to the man. But by following the *letter* of the Law, they completely missed the *spirit*. Sometimes the Law can keep us from doing the *right* thing.

At the end of his life when Jesus was with his disciples for one of the last times he said to them, *I give you a new commandment; love one another as I have loved you*.

Paul was a Pharisee's Pharisee. He lived the Law better than any of his peers. And yet, he came to realize that something was wrong. He realized that no matter how hard he tried he would always fall short. In his Letter to the Romans he wrote, *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* God doesn't grade us on the curve. You are either perfect or flawed. There is no middle ground. He came to realize that he would have to rely upon *grace*.

A few hundred years later another man discovered that same thing. His name was Martin Luther. As a Roman Catholic monk he tried to live the *perfect* life but he, too, realized that no matter how hard he tried, he fell short.

Both men learned that they had to rely not upon themselves but upon God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Paul planted his churches with the seed of God's grace. Imagine his disappointment when he learned that others had come after him and began to preach the necessity of Law. *Circumcision* is a code word for legalists. Paul was not against the Torah. He indicates that he maintained the traditions of his culture. He worshipped in the Temple as well as with the Church community. He saw no conflict or inconsistency. He was of the belief that if the Torah is a useful tool, fine, but it is not essential. Grace is the essential element of faith and our life together.

*Grace, grace, God's grace, grace that will pardon and cleanse within;  
Grace, grace, God's grace, grace that is greater than all our sin.*

*Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me;  
I once was lost but now am found, I was blind but now I see.*

Our challenge is to live grace-filled lives. We do that when we live forgiving lives—forgive one another as freely as we have been forgiven in Christ; serving lives—serving one another as Christ has served us; loving lives—loving one another with the same sacrificial love that Christ has for us; caring lives—caring for one another as God through Christ cares for us. In other words, our challenge is to be the embodiment of the Body of Christ. We do this not so that people will look at us as individuals or as First Federated Church and pat us on the back, not so that we can feel good about ourselves, but so that others can experience the *grace* of God and give glory to our Father, our Creator, in heaven.

Amen.