



*Don't Get It Twisted*

Jude 1:1-7

Sunday, May 7th, 2017 - Fourth Sunday in Easter

First Federated Church, Peoria, Illinois

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Last summer in Kalamazoo, MI various news outlets kept showing images of a bicycle, but it didn't look the pristine bikes you see from the sidewalk as you walk by a shop. The bike in the news was twisted and mangled because of a terrible accident. The handlebars were ripped off the frame and bent in half. The wheels weren't round anymore they were now taco shaped. The brake wires were disconnected and in a tangled mess. The frame itself was twisted like the strands of a rope. The entire bike had been so badly mangled it look more like a pile of rubbish than a bike. Laying in the street the smashed bike wasn't anything like it was supposed to be. It had turned from one thing into another.

That is something like what happened within the community of Christ followers that Jude was writing the letter to. Some members of the church had taken what was a good and free gift from God and twisted it into something else. They had turned it from one thing into another.

Some of those people in the church believed that grace, God's unmerited love which both forgives and transforms the sinner, gave them a license to say and do as they pleased. To them grace was freedom from godly living. Because grace is a gift generously given to all people they thought it freed them from living in accordance to the word of God. They didn't have to take Jesus' to commission to love one another just as he loves all people seriously. They didn't have to listen to Jesus instructions and refrain from doing things that lead others astray from God and into sinful lifestyles. Rather, they believed that because they were recipients of grace they could do whatever felt good to them. Whatever they fancied, even if it was in direct contradiction to God's word. They could do without hesitation.

The apostle Paul also sets out to address this very issue in the sixth chapter of Romans for the same thing was happening in the church at Rome. He states “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!” “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourself to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.” Paul is pointing out that recipients of grace respond to the gift with obedience, conforming to the will of God, not taking grace as means to satisfy the desires of the flesh. They follow after God with all their heart, with all their might, and with all their soul, in the knowledge that grace is a glorious gift, not to be construed into some license for disobedience.

Jude rallies against the same thing Paul was. Some church members had twisted God’s grace making into a wreck like the bike laying in the street. It no longer looked like grace. It no longer functioned like grace. It was a mangled mess. It had been turned from a good gift thing into license for destruction.

So Jude writes this letter as an encouragement to the followers of Jesus Christ, pushing them to holdfast to the true grace of God, not the corrupted mess the ungodly people had turned it into. The same encouragement is given to you and I through the words of Jude. The reality of our humanness, however, is that there are times in life when we think more like those church members who bent grace more than we care to admit. How many times have we done something against the will of God while thinking “God will forgive me again so one more time won’t be a problem.” At times we do this by putting work and sporting events before God. Or telling a white lie to your friend about your intentions for Friday night. Other times we covet the body of someone other than your spouse and turn to pornography. Or maybe we take a piece of pizza from the break room even though it was for someone else. When we think that God doesn’t care about what we do or say, or that God will forgive us even though we know what we are doing is counter to the will of God we begin to twist God’s grace into something it is not, turning it from one thing into another.

We do this because our very nature has been mangled by sin. The Heidelberg Catechism, one of our confession and a trusted and faithful witness to Christianity, states we are all “inclined to sin.” Another way to think about that is we are all twisted to the very core,

bending us into disobedience. As a result of our twistedness, we in turn twist other things: relationships - manipulating people for our benefit, desires - placing our agenda before the wellbeing of God's creation, knowledge - using data to scare and panic, speech - speaking ill instead of life. We even go so far as to twist the gift of grace into something it is not. In the book of Jude we catch a glimpse of ourselves. We aren't so different from the people Jude admonished. They were sinners. We are sinners. They needed grace. We need grace.

Grace, God's unmerited love which both forgives and transforms, is one of the most magnificent gifts given by God. God freely offers it to all people in all times and places. God offered grace to all the people mentioned in Jude. God continues to offer grace to all people for God continues to act in this world, at this time. We are witness to God's activity in our lives through many different ways, but none is more clear than the Easter narrative. Through that part of the Holy Scripture we are made aware that God gives to us grace through God's son, our Lord, Jesus Christ who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died. When Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross and drew his last breath grace became yours. It is through Jesus that we are the recipients of God's unmerited love and are forgiven of our sins even the times when we have messed up grace.

Taking God's word, spoken through Jude to heart, we are reminded to be cautious with the free gift of grace. We shouldn't intentionally twist it into a license to do and say as we please. Instead, we seek to honor God and the gift of grace through our words and deeds. By grace we have been set straight from sin and restored in God's love. We have been brought from death to life. Grace is God's gift to us and Jude warns us not to get it twisted.

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”