**Encountering Grace**

**FBC Albemarle**

**September 26, 2016**

It was just another youth event. A group of youth and few adult leaders loaded unto the buses and went to Walnut Creek Pavilion in Raleigh for the Christian Music Festival on a Sunday afternoon. It was going to be a long afternoon and evening since there were 10-12 Christian bands and artists who were scheduled to perform. It was a beautiful fall afternoon so the setting was enjoyable. We set out some blankets and lawn chairs to mark our group’s spot and begin enjoying the atmosphere.

The group was a mix of middle school and high school students. They divided up into their friend groups and went about enjoying themselves. They walked around the pavilion among the thousands of people that had gathered, enjoying the music and each other. As the concert continued into the night, something changed. The final act of the day was Michael W. Smith, a long time contemporary Christian artist. As he played the piano and sang, the atmosphere in the whole pavilion turned from a party to worship. Everyone sang out and began to truly worship God. It was an incredible experience.

Little did I know that evening, the shared experience changed the life of a bubbly, effervescent middle school girl. Robin had already placed her faith in Christ a few years prior but it was that worship experience that truly changed her life. That night, she gave herself to God fully, committing to a lifetime of service and willing to go and do whatever God had in store for her.

Since that night many years ago, Robin has graduated from Campbell University with her undergrad in religion and from Truett Seminary in Waco, Texas with her Master of Divinity. She has been serving as the Minister to Children at Frist Baptist Waco for the past four years.

I didn’t know that particular night was the moment in which her life was changed forever. Having reflected on that night with her since then, Robin talks about encountering God in an undeniable way. She knew she was never going to be the same after that.

For the past several weeks, we have been focusing on Worship Renewal. We’ve talked about worship being God-directed with our praise and thanksgiving. We’ve talked about humbling ourselves before the Lord in prayer, pleading for God’s mercy and grace. We’ve talked about our corporate worship being participatory rather than sitting back as spectators. Today, we focus on the truth that when we encounter God’s grace in worship, we cannot remain the same.

The Samaritan woman encountered Jesus and was changed forever. I am sure that day started out as an ordinary day for her; a normal day where she went to the well at noon rather than being with the other ladies earlier in the morning or later in the evening to draw water. She was probably tired of being talked about behind her back and getting looks of judgment from other women. She was minding her own business when the day shifted from ordinary to extraordinary.

A Jewish man struck up a conversation with her. This shouldn’t happen for a couple of reasons. First, men and women never fraternized together in public in that culture. Second, a Jew never talked with a Samaritan because the Jews looked down on Samaritans because of being a mixed race. But, Jesus was never one to follow the social norms of that time.

Jesus asks for a drink of water because he had been traveling for a while. The woman was surprised and asked how it is that he would ask for a drink from a Samaritan woman. Jesus then talks about a living water that would quench her “thirst” forever. The woman desired this magic-filled water until Jesus asks her to bring her husband. Then the truth comes out. She doesn’t have a husband but has had five husbands and the man she is living with at that time was not her husband.

She was taken back but knew that Jesus was no ordinary man. Maybe he was a magician. Maybe he was a mind-reader. Maybe he was a prophet, as she called him. Then Jesus reveals himself for who he really is, the Messiah; the one who has come to offer the grace of the Lord to not only the Jews but also to the Gentiles…to all of humanity!

This is what I know for sure because I have experienced it and many of you have also. When we encounter the Lord Jesus and his grace, we are never the same. First, when we encounter grace, we are humbled. Go back to vs. 19-20. The woman realized that Jesus was no ordinary man. In the same way, when we encounter him in worship, we recognize that He is God and we are not. We know that we do not measure up. We fall incredibly short of his standards. We recognize our shortcomings.

The Samaritan woman knew this also. Jesus had already called her out on the fact that her past and present relationships did not measure up. Yet, Jesus offers her grace of the living water and that same grace is offered to us today. Maybe we have already received the grace of salvation but our thoughts, attitudes, relationships and actions still do not match that of Christ’s. We need to go to the well not just once but on a daily basis. We need to stop trying to live life on our own but turn it over to God…and don’t be an Indian-giver and take it back as your leave through the doors! We need to place it at the feet of Jesus and leave it there.

Second, when we encounter grace, we are loved. “The time is coming and now has come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.” Jesus came in order for us to know and encounter God. Jesus showed the extent of the Father’s love for humanity through his life, death and resurrection. As Philippians 2 reminds us, “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!” (v. 6-8) “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:13) Therefore, “we love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)

The Samaritan woman experienced love that day like she had never experienced before. She encountered grace and the love of Jesus engulfed her. There is no way to replicate that kind of love. We can try to fill it with earthly relationships, with our own accomplishments, with accolades of others, or with worldly riches but nothing compares to the love of Christ our Savior and Messiah!

Finally, when we encounter grace, we are transformed. We can’t remain the same after encountering Jesus. It’s impossible! In verse 39, we find that the Samaritan woman could not contain herself with what she had experienced. She told everyone in town about her encounter. It didn’t matter if she broke every social norm or how others will perceive her. She shared her story with all who would listen. Her life was transformed.

Jim was also transformed! Jim is a gentleman Robert Stonestreet and Tommy Whitley met while passing out flyers for the Morrow Mountain service this summer. Jim’s life had not turned out the way he thought it would but at some point, he had heard about Jesus and somewhat placed his faith in him along the way. But something happened when Jim met Robert and Tommy. He encountered Jesus through the faithfulness of his disciples.

Robert and Tommy struck up a long conversation with Jim. In midst of that conversation, Jim expressed a yearning to be baptized, something he had not experienced when he decided to follow Jesus. So a few days after the encounter, we all met together and I had the privilege of baptizing Jim in the lake. I never met someone so excited about his baptism. Jim was giddy, a little nervous, a little unsure all at the same time but there was no doubt that his encounter with God’s grace through Robert and Tommy and the baptism was transformational! His life and outlook was changed forever.

When we encounter Jesus, we can’t remain the same. Something has to change. The way we see ourselves, the way we see others, the way we see the world, the way we see the future…we are transformed when we encounter Jesus.

Worship is the opportune time to encounter him. It isn’t the only time but it is an opportune time. Just like Robin and Jim were never the same again, we are not the same when we come face-to-face with Christ. May our worship always be a place where we encounter our Lord and Savior. May we experience his grace and mercy each time we are together as we worship with a willing and expectant heart. May it always transform us to being a little more like Jesus.