

Calvary United Methodist Church
January 16, 2011

THE VOICE OF GRACE
Rev. Dr. S. Ronald Parks



Children's Sermon

Isaiah 40:3-5

This is the day which the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. And let's take a cue from the joyful kids who are about to come up to the front at this time and celebrate God's good news. Come on up, kids!

Good morning! How's everybody this morning? Are you good this morning or are you great?

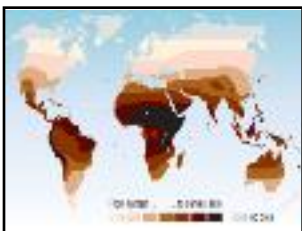
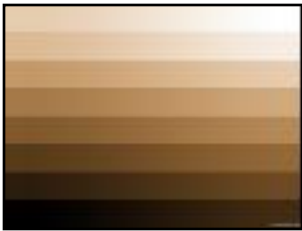
Here's something that we are going to do which is going to be a lot of fun and that is to sing a song that every person in this room knows how to sing including you. It's called *Jesus Loves the Little Children*. Do you know the song? If you don't know it, it is time you learned it because it is one of the classic all-time great songs. Some people learned it at camp or at Bible School or in Sunday School. Look at all these old people who know this song. It's one of the very few songs that everybody in our culture knows—maybe *Happy Birthday* or *America the Beautiful* and that may be it. But this is one that everybody should know. Mr. Gallup is going to play it for you. I bet you know it but you just don't connect the music and the title together.



All of you old people are going to put these guys to shame because you know this like you know your own name. Right? And all of God's people sang together with great zeal—*Jesus Loves the Little Children*.

Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world
Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight
Jesus loves the little children of the world.

You knew that didn't you? No. Do you know it now?



The part that always made me scratch my head was the line red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight. Who are they talking about? Who are the red, yellow, black and white children? Well you see that's the problem. I want you to point out to me a red person sitting here in this room. Can you find a red person? How about a yellow person? Now these are the words that we often use in our culture to define people—is there a black person in this room? Is there a white person in this room? Look up there at that screen that has the black letters to spell the word “white”. I want you to find a person in this room whose skin is that shade. Is there anybody here who is white? No. And if even there was an African American in this room there would be nobody here who was black. If there was an Asian American in the room there would be nobody here that was yellow. And if there was a Native American in the room there would be nobody here that is red.

The fact of the matter is that we are all brown, just different shades of brown. It goes from really, really light brown, what I would call beige. That is what many of us are. We are not quite white but we are certainly not dark brown—we are sort of beige in color. Look at that scale. That's a scale that makeup artists use to figure out what kind of makeup to put on people. They hold that up against somebody's face and they look at that and they are able because they have been schooled to match the right color makeup to go with that skin color.

Yes it's true that around the world there is this spectrum of brown that people around the world have different shades of skin. The fact that everybody is colored. Everybody is some shade brown. That is why signs like this and many of us are old enough to remember in our culture and they are really kind of strange from today's point of view.

Do you know what colored people were referred to about fifty years ago? Do you know who a colored person was? A colored person was a person who was of African American decent—what we sometimes call black people. They were considered to be colored.

Now when you think about it black and white doesn't describe anybody but those are words that perhaps were convenient. But if your skin was past a certain shade of beige or brown you had to do things like find a



different water fountain to drink from. Now can you imagine that? That because my skin is a little browner than yours I had to go drink some place else.



In fact, I had to go to the movies some place else.



Depending upon how my face looked and the color of my skin I couldn't eat at certain places.



And in the school systems that were part of our culture about fifty years ago if you look at the signs these young people are holding they say: "We won't go to school with negroes." That is another way of saying we don't want people who have skin that is darker than ours sitting next to us in class.



Why in the world would that be a problem? Can you think of a reason why the tone of your skin would be a problem? I can't either. But let me tell you something. If I go on vacation this summer and I come back my skin is dark. It doesn't last but for a while it's really dark. I, in effect, change colors when I go on vacation.

JANUARY 2011						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
30	31					1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

Tomorrow is usually considered to be a National Holiday. How many of you have time off from school tomorrow? Do you know why you have off from school tomorrow? Because tomorrow is Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. What's the big deal about Martin Luther King, who was obviously a darker person than most of us here? (One of the children says, "Because he helped change the law and help everyone





treated the same.”) In fact on August 28, 1963 there was a large gathering of all colors of people. We are talking really white people and dark colored people. It was held down in Washington on the Mall and Dr. King gave a speech that day which was probably one of the ten most significant speeches ever given in the English language. The speech was called *I Have a Dream*. In that speech he said this about skin color.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

In other words, what’s in my skin, the amount of pigment in my skin, will not make any difference whatever. What’s in my heart, however, is the thing people will judge me with. What I do, what I say, how I feel, what I think, that’s what makes me a person of great worth or a person who tears other people down.

What happened just about a year later something called the Civil Rights Act was passed. It made everybody equal in many ways in places where they were considered to be not equal. There is a portion of scripture from Isaiah that talks about making everybody the same.



There is a voice calling out to us: “Get ready! The Lord God is coming! Make the word straight and smooth for His feet. Fill in the valleys. Flatten the mountains and the hills. Patch the pot-holes. Clear out the rocks.” Then God’s glory will be shown to everyone—everywhere. We’ll all see it together. This is the Word of the Lord.



Everybody of every possible skin color will all be able to see God’s glory once we are all recognized as people who are valuable in God’s eyes. This is the Word of the Lord. God’s love is colorblind. God doesn’t really care what color skin you are. Do you know why he doesn’t care? Because he made you that way. You could no more change the color of your skin, or the color of your eyes, or the color of you hair than you could change whether the sun is going to come tomorrow morning or not.

God made you that way and for people of faith sharing that love



with everybody that God has created in their own unique way, that's the work that God has given to us. So when we treat others with love and respect and passion we are doing God's work because God's work is our work. That's what we have been asked to do with your lives as followers of Jesus. It's hard work sometimes because let's fact it there are a lot of things that kind of want us and tempt us to treat people differently based on stuff that really makes no difference. But it's still the work that God has put before us and its God's work to let everybody know that God has made them wonderful in their own special way.



Enjoy your day off tomorrow. Do something fun and remember when you get up in the morning why it is you are not going to school. It's a day of celebration to remember that we are all joyfully and wonderfully made in the image of God.

Thanks for sharing in our time this morning.

Message

Luke 8



Until about two weeks ago if somebody said the name Ted Williams this is who you would be thinking of. He was a player for the Boston Red Socks, left fielder for his entire career, No. 9—The Splendid Splinter they called him.



But since January 3rd another individual by the name of Ted Williams has taken over our conscious. See if you recognize him. (A number of videos are shown about the homeless man, Ted Williams, and how he received job offers, etc. because he had a God-given gift of a great voice. He tells about his life and how alcohol and drugs and a few other things came a part of his life.)



“I have God-given gift of voice. I am an ex radio announcer who has fallen on hard times. Please, any help would be greatly appreciated. Thank you and God bless. Happy Holidays.”

The video was shot in the middle of December, posted on line on U-Tube on January 3rd. Since that time in the last thirteen days it has been viewed by 30 million people. So when people hear the name Ted

Williams the Splendid Splinter isn't what they are thinking right now. It's this guy. He was hoping that somebody would hear this gift that he has of a God-given voice and that they would notice him.



Well he got his wish because three days later this is where he was. Not in Columbus, Ohio, he was in New York City. (The announcer says that the job offers are pouring in—Thursday, January 6th.) Then it shows him introducing the hosts of the *Today Show*. They interview him and say that everybody deserves a second chance.



Everybody in this country deserves a second chance. In the last eleven days this guy has had more than a second chance. He has had job offers from Oprah, the Cleveland Cavaliers, dozen of companies, dozen of stations. In fact the Kraft Company was the first to get on the bandwagon and actually hire him to do something. You may have already seen the commercial that Ted Williams provides the background voice to.



Since that time, if you have been following the story of Ted Williams at all if you have been any aware of what is going on; things have not worked out so smoothly for good old Ted. In fact the longer his name has been out there; the more you are seeing information about who Ted Williams really is. These are six of his mug shots. On Dr. Phil earlier this week he met six of his nine children, many of whom he hasn't seen since shortly after they were born. He was reunited with his mother who he hasn't seen in thirty years. And all sorts of information is just pouring out now about why this guy with a perfect radio voice was homeless in the first place.

I find it interesting, as people are learning more and more about Ted Williams, that initially they thought it was great he got a second chance and then the more they find out what he has been through in his life the less interested they are in seeing him succeed. He's has so many chances that apparently look this guy stumbled into this, he doesn't deserve it, he shouldn't have it, he really should just be put away.



As a matter of fact, Ted Williams today is put away. He is in rehab because there were so many people saying so many things to him that he went back to drinking. Not because he enjoys being homeless or enjoys being irresponsible or enjoys being a burden on other people

but because it was all he knew to do.

Whose voice can you trust? Who are the people in your life that are sharing with you words of great joy and support and who are the people who are looking to see you fall? You see everyone has the demons. Everyone has those things in their past, in their personality, in their history. Everyone has those things that they are trying to get away from, trying to run from. We are all possessed. And Jesus knew all about possession, all kind of possession.

In New Testament time possession, the things that burden, the forces that tear at us were thought to be caused by supernatural beings. Some of them were out in the air. Some of them were in the heart. But listen to the story of a healing and tell me if you don't see the parallel between this individual in the Gospel of Luke and poor old Ted Williams.

A homeless, naked man approached Jesus. Many demons controlled his life. People were afraid of him. Prison couldn't hold him. No one wanted him around. He was forced to hide out in the cemetery.

When he saw Jesus, he fell down and shouted, "Leave me along, Jesus, Son of God!" Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"Crowded," he replied, because so many demons had taken up residence in him. Jesus agreed to allow the demons to leave the name and inhabit a nearby herd of pigs; an arrangement that destroyed the animals. The locals heard the story and came running. They found the possessed man sitting at Jesus' feet: calm, clothed and clean. Their reaction? Fear. They demanded that Jesus leave the area immediately. But the one freed from demons begged Jesus to go with him. "No," Jesus said, "Go home and tell everyone how much God has done for you."

Go home and speak the message.

There are two messages that you will hear in your life today. I hope you only hear one of them here. But I can tell you when you walk out these doors you are going to hear the other one shouting as loudly





as possible as forcibly as other people can shout. Some voices you will hear are disgraceful. Disgrace is the word that is used to talk about people who want to see other people's lives torn up and destroyed. Distrustful voices, voices of suspicion, voices of delusion, voices that suggest to you that you probably can't do what it is you are longing to do. You don't deserve all of the things that God has poured out to you. They are voices that would be glad to see you go under. Some people just call them pragmatic. You know, don't set yourself goals that are too high, don't risk too much, don't make too many friends that are of a different skin hues than you, don't go into that section of town. There are all sorts of things that people tell you that are pretty reasonable when all they want to do is pull you down so that they can be up. Those are disgraceful voices.

But then you are going to hear voices that are graceful. Be reminded that God sends the rain and the sunshine on those that deserve it and those who are sinners just like me. Isn't that a glorious thing? Voices of grace will extend a hand to you. They will not be pleased to see you fail. They will not want you to fall.

Voices of grace sound very different than voices of disgrace because voices of grace speak words of gratitude. Thanks be to God for the gifts of this day. Thanks be to God for the things that challenge me. Thanks be to God for the presence of these poor sinners sitting around me. Voices of gratitude are voices of grace. Voices of release are voices of grace.

Do you know that the most gracious thing that happened to Ted Williams was somebody who took notice of him? They filmed him. They threw it on the web and suddenly lots of people were taking notice of him. What was curious about the story was that it seemed that everyone wanted to participate in his liberation. They wanted to give

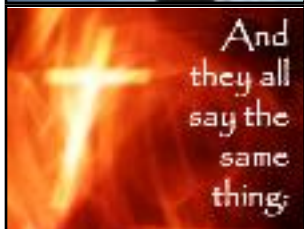
him a chance. Kraft macaroni and cheese paid him who knows how much to speak about three sentences. They all know that everyone deserves to be released. Kraft did it for the dough; gracious people do it for the glory of God. They know that words of grace are grateful and they release people and they are words of acceptance.

I don't know Ted Williams but I've prayed for the dude. Anybody who has been through that much in his life, not only the stuff before the middle of December when they filmed it but everything that has happened after that. This guy needs some help. He needs some guidance. He needs some graceful people in his life. People who will not use him. People who will not only show up after twenty some years because maybe he has a couple bucks now. They accept him for who he is. They understand the wrongs that he has done. They are horrified like the rest of us by his bad choices but they also understand that there is grace, and God's grace is a word of acceptance. God's grace is a word of comfort; to embrace, to enfold, to put your arm around somebody and say, "I know you messed up but you deserve the grace of God." Not because you are worthy but because God says so--gratitude, release, acceptance, comfort, encouragement.

What Ted Williams now needs more than anything else is somebody who will tell him that he is worthy of God's love. He speaks a lot of God's talk but maybe he hasn't been shown that. Maybe it's more than just words.

What do those of voices of grace sound like? Some of them come in your ears from you. You speak a voice of grace. You speak with words of gratitude and acceptance and release and encouragement and courage. You can speak like that. And sometimes that voice in your head—that still small voice that calls you to be prophetic, that word of God that comes to you, sometimes it comes in your voice. You didn't get it from anybody else. God has inspired you. God has placed that knowledge in you. Don't play dumb, you don't do it very well. You know exactly what I am talking about. Sometimes the voice of grace speaks from inside your mind. But many times it sounds like the voice of a friend, of a child, of a parent, of a loved one, of a mentor, of a pastor, of a Sunday School teacher. Sometimes the voice of grace can come from the strangest place and from faces that look nothing like





ours. But all of the voices, whether they come from inside our minds and our conscious or whether they come from the strangest place, they all sound like Jesus, every single one.

And ultimately they all say the same thing: Let my people go. Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty I am free at last.

May the word of God liberate us to be people of grace.