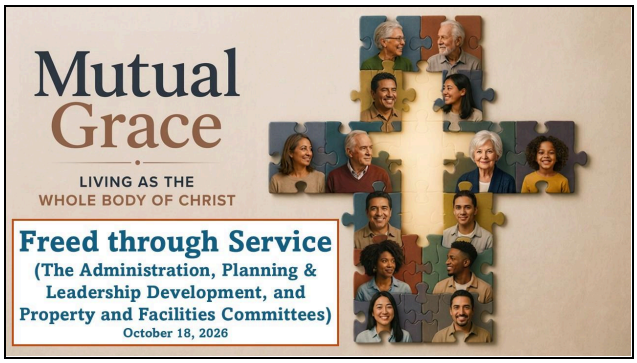
Mutual Grace (Week 3) - Freed through Service



Yesterday's Sermon Summary

1. Human self-preoccupation is a survival mechanism. To not starve or be lunch for some lurking predators, our ancestors had to remain hypervigilant about their own safety and resources moment to moment, day by day, year after year. If homo sapiens as a species are 300,000 years old, if humans started to farm only about 12,000 years ago, and if human civilization began only 5,000-6,000 years ago, then for only 2%-4% of human history have we had the luxury to think about things beyond our next meal or where we might get a secure, peaceful night's sleep.

2. Modern neuroscientists and evolutionary psychologists see the lingering effect of these previous millennia in what's called our Default Mode Network (abbreviated DMN). This refers to what happens in our brains when we are not actively engaged in an external task or occupied by external stimuli. And what does a human brain left on its own do? It defaults to self-referential thought; it turns its sight entirely upon the self. It analyzes past mistakes, it fixates on present sources of anger or anxiety, and it daydreams about a better future. Quite literally, our brains cannot help but turn back inward the moment we stop focusing outward.

3. Social psychologists have discovered a long list of ways this involuntary, insular pull manifests itself in daily life. We naturally perceive ourselves as the central actor in every situation, overestimating how much others are noticing or thinking about us. This is called "the egocentric brain function." We attribute our successes to internal character ("I worked hard for this") and our failures to external circumstances ("That professor was terrible"), preserving the status of the self at all costs. This is called "the self-serving brain function." We also tend to believe that we see the world rationally and objectively, while others, especially those who disagree with us, are biased, misinformed, or malicious. This is called "the naïve realism of the brain."

4. One result of these overriding self-concerns, according to 20th-century philosopher Simone Weil, is that 3/4s of our lives are figments of our own imagination. What we perceive to be the real world isn't; it is instead a fiction created by our pathological reflex toward self-preservation and self-interest.

5. To be clear, these inherent predilections cannot accurately be described as personal or character flaws…in fact, far from it. They are quite literally our cognitive software, the prime directive of which is this single fundamental question - "How does this, whatever this is, affect me for better or worse?" In a word, human beings are "bent," turned in and around themselves. It's unavoidable. For each and every one of us.

6. Protestant reformer Martin Luther coined a phrase in Latin about this innate human inclination: “homo incurvatus in se,” or in English, “Human beings are curved in around themselves.” That sounds a lot like our DMN, does it not?

7. So often when we talk about “sin” or human fallibility in church, we do so in ways that make it seem as if all our human failures, foibles, and fickleness is attributable to our weak wills and poor choices. That's an unhelpful oversimplification. The apostle Paul, author of many of the letters within our New Testament, often used the term “flesh” (“sarx” in ancient Greek) for the worst tendencies that define human beings, such as rage, violence, cruelty, greed, gluttony, sexual usury, and so on. And that word “flesh” strikes at how deeply-ingrained our impulses, drives, and desires are. We have them; we didn’t choose them. We were born with them; we are responsible for them; and we are so often irresponsible with and because of them.

8. So how would you describe what God is intending to do in our lives? What’s God after? And what is the spiritual life all about? In light of what we’ve said so far, you could put it like this - God is unbending us. God, through the example of Christ and the work of the Spirit, is grabbing us in both hands and pulling us open, straightening that which has been curved in upon itself. And this unbending process can be slow and uncomfortable, but God is persistent…God will not rest until you and I have been unfurled, until you and I acknowledge, resist, renounce, and rise above the worst of human nature in ourselves, and until we stop merely existing and start really living.

9. Let’s be pragmatic for a moment - what habits or practices can we pursue that cooperate with the divine intention to unbend us and turn our attention outward beyond ourselves? Well, one is tied to the series that occupies us this October - serving others releases us from the death-grip of the flesh in our lives. The late Dallas Willard put it this way: “When we serve, we are freed from the tyranny of self-interest… Self-forgetfulness is the secret joy of service.” So this series is a divine invitation – a chance for the chains of self-preservation and self-interest to be loosened and to fall away, a chance not to think less of ourselves but to think of ourselves less, and a chance to discover the kind and quality of delight only accessible through lowly servanthood.

10. You may have your well-rehearsed reasons for why you think you can’t serve your neighbors during the week or your church family here at KirkWood, but the longer you believe your own excuses, the greater the risk and cost incurred to you, the more tightly curved in around yourself you will become. Remember – as Christians, we expend ourselves to be filled; as Christians, we seek what’s best for others to find what’s best for ourselves; as Christians, we stoop in order to soar.

How Administration, Property & Facilities, and Planning & Leadership Development Committees Serve KirkWood?

1. The Administration Committee - Tammie Organski (torganski@gmail.com)
- The mission of the Administration Committee is to help KirkWood be a good steward of all God has entrusted to our care, and to support Session in its leadership role through financial, policy, and personnel management.
- Key tasks: budgeting ("We start with ministry, not numbers"), financial oversight ("Honoring the trust you place in us when you give"), policy oversight, and, in conjunction with Pastor Chris, personnel oversight.

2. The Property & Facilities (P&F) Committee - Jamie Reno (h2orenos@gmail.com)
- These are all the areas that P&F manages for the sake of KirkWood: Technological hardware, lawn & leaf team, spring/fall clean up, van maintenance and management, facilities repairs, adopt a bed, Advent decor, fencing, and the "tree trail" and "native garden."
- Key upcoming dates and needs: 1) The Fall Clean-up of the grounds on Saturday, 11/7, 8:30-11:00am, 2) The "Hanging of the Greens" (Advent decor) on Sunday, 11/22, at noon after the 11am class hour, and 3) we need several folk willing to help with leaf clean-up/removal in November and December.

3. The Planning and Leadership Development (PLD) Committee - Murray Ritter (murrayritter51@gmail.com)
- The mission of PLD

1) Assist change
2) Assess operations against core values
3) Plan for future
4) Train new Elders
5) Annual Report & Congregational Meeting
5) Session retreats

- Past and present PLD areas of emphasis = 1) in 2022 and 2023, PLD collated and reviewed all of KW's programs, groups & activities (PG&As), 2) in 2023 and 2024, PLD initiated and supported the creation of KW's core values, 3) in 2024-2025, PLD helped review and suggested changes to KW's organizational structure, 4) in 2026, PLD has helped vet options for how we can keep up with the way our church is growing.