

Today I want to talk about, “Being a church – powered by grace.”

Usually when we think of “grace”, we think of God’s grace to save – the sort of grace that John Newton wrote about in his famous song, “Amazing grace” – it’s all about the saving grace of God.

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

*T'was Grace that taught my heart to fear.
And Grace, my fears relieved.
How precious did that Grace appear
The hour I first believed.*

*Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
'Tis Grace that brought me safe thus far
and Grace will lead me home.*

*The Lord has promised good to me.
His word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be,
As long as life endures.*

*Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,*

*I shall possess within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.*

*Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease;
I shall profess, within the vale,
A life of joy and peace.*

That's the amazing, saving grace of God. But today, I want to talk about a different kind of grace. It's a grace that some of us have experienced, and some haven't. It's a form of God's grace that is both undervalued, and un-harnessed.... And that is to become a church, **powered** by grace....

Herbert Jackson was a missionary. And when he first began working as a missionary, he was assigned a car that had to be push-started. So he came up with a cunning plan.

He went to a near-by school, got permission to take some kids out of class, and they push-started him. As he made his rounds, he would either park on a hill or leave the engine running. And he used this ingenious procedure for two years.

Finally, ill health forced the Jackson family to leave, and a new missionary came to replace him. When Jackson proudly began to explain the procedure for

getting the car started, the new man went and popped the bonnet... And before Jackson had finished making his explanation, the new missionary interrupted, "Why, Dr. Jackson, I believe the only trouble is this loose cable."

He gave the cable a twist, stepped into the car, turned the key, and away it went...

For two years needless trouble had come become a routine. The power was there all the time. Only a loose connection kept Jackson from putting the power to work.ⁱ

And for much of the Christian church today, this is a metaphor for how we do ministry. So much trouble becomes a routine, where we must do certain things, or one particular person has to be responsible for getting everything done, when the power is there all the time. All we've got to do, is make the connection, and the power is there.

We set aside one person to be the priest, or the minister, or the pastor, and we think "Yeah, they're the ones – they've got it all covered – they'll do God's stuff – they can pour out the ministry, and we'll soak it up...."

And, the extent that people like me, go along with that, determines how much of God's grace we deny **you**...

When Bush Disciples was first getting started, a question that I had on my mind (which I still haven't answered, by the way), was "People want to give me a title – How do I describe what I do?"

Anglicans and Roman Catholics have priests. The Pentecostals call them "Pastors" or "Senior Pastors". The Presbyterians have "Ministers". The Uniting Church, at various times, has had Ministers, pastors, padres, youth workers, deacons, deaconesses....

When I was in the U C , I was a "Minister of the Word", but I don't like the way all these titles tend to set one particular person apart from the rest of the congregation... I am a servant of Christ. You are a servant of Christ... We are all part of the one body – we just have different functions.

In my previous church, I had the title of "Reverend", and I hated it. There is nothing more to be revered about me, than anyone else. In the church, the one who cleans the toilet, is as holy and to be honoured as much as the one who preaches the Word... We are all one in Christ, but with different functions.

When they were re-doing the church directory of all the ministers in QLD, I rang the Synod office, and asked them to change my title from "Rev" to "Mr". And the office girl said, "I don't think I can do that". And I said

“Of course you can. All you have to do, is go into your database, and change the letters “Rev” to “Mr”. And then whenever you send me a letter, it’ll come addressed to Mr Michael Brumpton, instead of Rev Michael Brumpton”

“But I don’t think I can do that” ... and I said, “Just do it, please”.

Well, shortly afterwards I got a phone call from the head honcho – the secretary of the Synod. And she said, “Now Michael, what’s this that you’re going on about????”

So I told her what I wanted, and she refused. I told her why, and she refused. Basically, “You’re ordained as a Minister of the Word – you have to have the title Rev – it’s part of our polity, and the particular ministry to which you are ordained” ...

So, when we went to the mail box, there would be two types of letters that would address me as Reverend – Mail from church office, and Mail from Robyn’s Grandmother...

I believe, it’s all left over from an era, when the minister was a position, in some cases of power, but certainly always to be respected and honoured, and upheld within the town community, simply because of the position that one was in....

And so, I've reacted **against** the title of "minister", or any title that sets me apart from you, for that matter.

I would however, be happy to be known as "a minister of the Gospel", but only if **you** understand, that **you also**, are a minister of the Gospel.

Paul says here, in V⁷ *Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.*

I've reacted against the title "minister", because of what it conveys, but that's not what it's supposed to convey. The Greek word that Paul uses for "Minister", is the word "διάκονος", which literally means "Servant". A minister of the Gospel, is a servant of the Gospel. A minister of Christ, is a servant of Christ....

The position of "minister", is not a position to be used for power, or influence, or to gain the respect of a community – it is to be a servant. I serve the Gospel. I serve Christ. I serve you – the church....

And I am not the only minister here at Bush Disciples – you have **all** been made ministers of the Gospel. You have **all** been made servants of Christ. I am happy to be known as "a minister of the Gospel", when you understand, that you **also**, are a minister of the Gospel.

Worthiness and ability, knowledge and intellect, have got nothing to do with it.

Look at the Apostle Paul. We know him as this great and mighty Christian, but how did he view himself?

1 Corinthians 15: ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

In 1 Timothy, he describes himself as “the worst of sinners”ⁱⁱ.

And here in Ephesians 3, he says “I am the very least of all the saints”ⁱⁱⁱ, or as the NIV translates “I am less than the least of all God’s people”.....

Now there was a minister who knew himself better than his congregation knew him.

He knew he was unworthy to be a minister (or a servant) of the gospel, but he was **made** one. It was a gift of God’s grace – it was a working of God’s power.....

And you might feel that you’re unworthy to be considered a minister of the Gospel. I know I feel unworthy... Maybe you’ll only be as good as Paul...

In the church, there is a measure of God’s grace – the power of God, to minister. It is God’s grace, to give

power, to serve. And this grace is something that we all should experience. We experience it as we minister. We experience it as we serve.

People like me “ministers” – “vocational preachers” if you like... - we’re not very good at sharing the grace around. Sometimes it feels easier to just “do stuff” ourselves, rather than encouraging all of the ministers of the church, into the ministry that God is calling them to...

And sometimes people like me, need people like you, to step up and say, “Hang on Michael, you’re hogging the grace.” “You’re not the only servant here. You’re not the only minister here. You’re hogging the grace.”

My prayer is that, this church – without exception – everyone of you, will be able to quote V7 as a statement which is true for you: **V⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.**

That’s my prayer – that each one of you will be made a minister. That each one of you will experience the blessing of God’s grace in service. That doesn’t mean that you’ll all be preachers, or you’ll all be teachers... They’re the gifts that God has given me, and He might’ve given some of you those gifts too.... But

He'll give each of us different gifts, to minister in different ways...

I'm not particularly good at pastoral care. I'm too quick to say, "Just get over it". But some of you minister by bringing the love and mercy of God, to people who need that kind of care.

I'm not very good with little kids. Sometimes I can't even remember their names. But some of you are ministers, who lead children to Christ.

Some of you minister through children's stories. Some of you minister in music and song. Some of you minister by encouraging, or by exhortation – that is urging one another on. Some of you minister in prayer – by praying publically and by praying privately, upholding the ministry of bush disciples in prayer – by praying for me and my family.

Some of you can minister by helping to set up, or helping to pack up after church.

We can all minister through sharing our faith, with those who don't know Christ.

The common element, is that it is a gift of God's grace, and it is a working of God's power.... Do you know what that means? It means serving God beyond our physical capability. It means serving God beyond our

intellectual capacity, and trusting in the power of His Spirit.

And that's why it's called "grace". We haven't earned the right to be ministers, but by the grace of God, He makes you a minister of His Gospel.... You don't have to be a Christian for decades to serve. In fact I heard a statistic on the wireless only a few days ago, that 90% of people who become Christians, have been led to Christ by someone who has been a Christian themselves for less than 2 years.

Last week – Ephesians 2 – was about how we together, are being built together – with Christ, into His building. And for this purpose, together, He makes us ministers of the Gospel.

This is His eternal purpose. And the church – we Christians – are witnesses to this purpose. **V¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold (many faceted) wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.**

We're starting to get spiritual here: When Paul refers to "rulers and authorities in the heavenly places", he's talking about Satan and his demons. Later on in

Ephesians, when we come to chapter 6, we'll be learning more about the spiritual battle that takes place.

But here, we just need to learn one thing. Satan and his demons are defeated (their arrest warrant is signed), and one day that will be executed, they will be thrown into the fiery pit. But until that day, Satan and his demons do their worst, to destroy the work of God.

When Christians minister – when the least of the saints, serve by God's grace, Satan and his demons, shudder. They are reminded of the will and purpose God, which includes the grace that He shows to us, and their demise.

One day, Jesus sent 72 people out on mission. He sent 36 pairs of nobodies – 72 people like you and me. He sent them as ministers in his service. And when they returned, they were all excited, and they told Him all of the things that God had done through them. ^{Luke 10:}

¹⁸ And he said to them, **"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.**

That's what happens when ordinary people like you and I, become ministers by the grace and power of God...

Satan doesn't want you to be a minister – it takes his ground from him, and it reminds him that his days are numbered.

But the God of Grace makes you His minister.

V⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

Will you say that with me?

V⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

Do you believe it? Will you say it again?

V⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

Don't let the rest of us be 'grace hogs' – get in on it.

ⁱ Adapted from www.holwick.com

ⁱⁱ 1 Timothy 1:15-17 (ESV) ¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. ¹⁷ To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ephesians 3:8 (ESV)

⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,