

Lesson 17: First Article - Loving, Merciful, Gracious

“All this he does out of pure love and goodness, without our merit, as a kind father who cares for us so that no evil may befall us.”

- Dr. Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*: The First Article

Keys to Lesson 17:

Topic: Loving, Merciful, Gracious

Thesis: God forgives us because He is loving, merciful, and gracious.

Key question: What does it mean that God is loving, merciful, and gracious?

Catechism: Sverdrup Questions 123-135

Accompanying Bible Story: Exodus 14 – Crossing the Red Sea

Warm-up or review:

As students enter the classroom, have a task posted for them.

Options:

Finish paragraph from Lesson 16

Finish questions from Lesson 16

Finish Lesson 16 summary

Lesson 16 quick quiz

Read and summarize Exodus 14 – the passage is quite long, so a retelling might be better use of time

Read the Sverdrup questions assigned for this lesson

Introduce new lesson:

Options:

Review Exodus 14 summaries

Read and discuss the student worksheet text

NOTE: The term “foreshadow” is used at the end of the student text. This is a term with which they should be familiar from their English Language Arts classes at school. Prompt a definition from them before offering them one of your own. You may even begin the lesson by asking them if they know what foreshadowing means. Perhaps they have examples from literature they have read at school or from their school classes.

The people of Israel were stuck. God had just shown His power through the ten plagues He sent on the Egyptians. He had put to death the firstborn in Egypt. Pharaoh’s will was finally broken. The people of Israel had been sent away to worship the Lord. But...

But God had led them to a dead end, it seemed. That, at least, was their conclusion. They began to panic as soon as they saw that Pharaoh had changed his mind. He was not so happy that he had driven his slaves out of Egypt. He called up his army and pursued them. He knew they were trapped; and they would either die or go back to Egypt, back into slavery. Behind them was the wilderness through which they had just traveled filled by Pharaoh and his army. Before them was the Red Sea, menacing, uncrossable. They were stuck.

The people grumbled and complained, crying out to God, asking why they had been brought to the wilderness to die. Moses spoke to them from God, though, the plan God had for them: “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for

you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent.”

Then God parted the waters of the sea. A wind blew to dry the exposed ground. The people of Israel passed safely through the sea, its waters a high wall on each side of the way. As they reached the safety of the far shore, the Egyptians followed them. But God finished His plan by closing the gap. The Egyptians were drowned. As the story ends we read, “Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. When Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses.”

It’s a true story, but it is also a foreshadowing about what God did for us through Jesus. Because God loved His people Israel, He saved them from Egyptian slavery and death. They did not show themselves worthy. As a matter of fact, they only complained. But God showed them His mercy and graciously saved them by taking them on dry ground through the Red Sea. Because God loves us, He saves us from our slavery to sin. He has had mercy on us even though we do not deserve it. By His grace He has given us the path to life through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In this lesson we learn that God is loving, merciful, and gracious.

Lesson:

Help the students work through the text and Bible passages in the student material.

*** Copy the First Article of the Apostles’ Creed.**

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

*** Copy the end of the meaning for the First Article from your Lutheran *Small Catechism* beginning with “and that He does...”**

...and that He does this purely out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all of which I am in duty bound to thank, praise, serve, and obey Him. This is most certainly true.

The key to this lesson on the last three attributes of God is the phrase “*purely out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.*” This truth forms the point of the student text and should be the goal of studying the following Bible passages.

*** Read and summarize Jeremiah 31:3.**

*The LORD appeared to him from afar, saying,
I have loved you with an everlasting love;
Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness.*

God spoke to His people to affirm to them that He loved them.

*** Read and summarize John 3:16.**

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Because God loves the world, God gave us Jesus so that we who believe in Him will have eternal life instead of eternal death.

You may want to spend some time expanding the definition of “love.” The term is bandied about in our society in so many loose and meaningless ways that it becomes imperative that we understand the difference between *agape* and any other definitions we might have for the term. It seems particularly popular to define love as an all accepting bundle of cosmic feelgood fluff. God does not have an all accepting cosmic bundle of feel goodies for us. What He did do was offer Himself in the ultimate sacrifice, becoming our sin and experiencing our death, so that we do not have to die eternally. Sacrifice for the good of the other is the core of what true love is.

*** Read and summarize Romans 5:8.**

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Jesus (Christ) died for us while we were still sinners in order to show us how much He loves us.

*** What do these three verses tell us about why God wants to forgive us our sins?**

All three texts point us to the love of God as the motivating factor in our salvation

We cannot overemphasize the love of God. Even though we prove to be of no value, we prove to be worthless complainers, God still values us and wants to be in a relationship with us. We rebel, we sin, we blaspheme, we demand our own way; and still God wants us to be with Him in eternity. He does all that is necessary for us because He loves us.

*** Read and summarize Romans 15:8, 9.**

For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, “Therefore I will give praise to you among the Gentiles, and I will sing to Your name.”

Jesus (Christ) became a servant to the Jewish people (the circumcision) to prove true God’s promise given to their ancestors (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). His message is also for non-Jews (the Gentiles) so that God would be glorified because of His mercy. This is proven by the Old Testament quotation that says there will be praise to God and singing to His name also from the Gentiles.

Note the key that salvation of the gentiles is “for His mercy.”

*** Read and summarize Titus 3:5.**

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus saved us not because we deserve it or because of anything good we have done; but because He is merciful, He washed us so that we are born again and made new by the Holy Spirit.

Note for the students the washing of regeneration and renewing in the Holy Spirit. Connect these to the foreshadowing in Exodus 14. that passing through the waters of the Red Sea point forward to baptism.

*** Read and summarize 1 Peter 1:3.**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...

We bless God because in His great mercy He causes us to be born again and have the hope of life made possible through the resurrection of Jesus.

*** What do these three verses say about God's motivation to save?**

It is because of His mercy and not anything that we have done that God saves us.

*** Read and summarize Romans 3:24.**

...being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus...

God justifies us as a gift by His grace which is made possible because we are redeemed by Jesus.

This verse is packed with theological terms that might need defining. Justified means declared not guilty. Grace is that attribute of God that causes Him to act on our behalf even though we don't deserve it. Redemption carries with it being freed from slavery, in this case being freed from slavery to sin. Again the parallels to Exodus are strong.

You might use the GRACE acrostic: God's Riches At Christ's Expense.

*** Read and summarize Ephesians 2:8.**

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God...

There is nothing in me that can save me. I am saved only because God saves me because of His grace received through faith.

Herein lies the great mystery of our salvation. Grace is needed. Faith is needed. Both are gifts given apart from our merit. It is only by God's grace we are saved. It is only through faith we are saved. Thus two of the Reformation pillars: grace alone, faith alone. Yet it is not my faith that saves me since I cannot have faith apart from it being gifted to me.

*** Read and summarize Titus 2:11.**

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.

The only way anyone can be saved (all men) is by the coming of the grace of God.

*** Which of His attributes does God use to bring about our salvation?**

It is only through God's graciousness that we can be saved.

*** List all twelve attributes of God that we have learned in these lessons.**

Eternal, immutable, spirit, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, holy, just, faithful, loving, merciful, gracious

This lesson ends here rather abruptly, perhaps, so you will need to draw some kind of conclusion. It might be good to use these last three attributes to begin to transition to the studies on the Second Article. Before then, however, we will have one more lesson on the First Article looking particularly at creation.

Summary:

Options:

Students write questions in their question column

Students write a three to four sentence summary: What did I learn in this lesson?

Students write a SEE paragraph

Possible paragraph prompt:

Why is it important that God be gracious?

Sample paragraph:

It is important that God be gracious because without His grace we cannot be saved. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God..." (Ephesians 2:8 NASB). There is no good in us that makes us deserving of salvation. God, however, loves us and is merciful to us. He saves us as a gift by His grace.

Exodus 14

1 Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Tell the sons of Israel to turn back and camp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea; you shall camp in front of Baal-zephon, opposite it, by the sea. 3 For Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, ‘They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’ 4 Thus I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD.” And they did so.

5 When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart toward the people, and they said, “What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?” 6 So he made his chariot ready and took his people with him; 7 and he took six hundred select chariots, and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. 8 The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he chased after the sons of Israel as the sons of Israel were going out boldly. 9 Then the Egyptians chased after them with all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

10 As Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD. 11 Then they said to Moses, “Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”

13 But Moses said to the people, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. 14 The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent.”

15 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward. 16 As for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land. 17 As for Me, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. 18 Then the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD, when I am honored through Pharaoh, through his chariots and his horsemen.”

19 The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them. 20 So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night.

21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided. 22 The sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. 23 Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea. 24 At the morning watch, the LORD looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion. 25 He caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made them drive with difficulty; so the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from Israel, for the LORD is fighting for them against the Egyptians.”

26 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and their horsemen.” 27 So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak, while the Egyptians were fleeing right into it; then the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. 28 The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, even Pharaoh’s entire army that had gone into the sea after them; not even one of them remained. 29 But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

30 Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 31 When Israel saw the great power which the Lord had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses.