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**West Valley Presbyterian Church  
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**HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE?**

George Wilson was a criminal.

In fact George Wilson made it his career to be a criminal. He was indicted on six counts of obstructing and robbing the US mail AND threatening bodily harm to a US mail carrier – and in fact he wounded him.

Now this was way back in the 1830s when Andrew Jackson was president. And back then, such a violent assault was cause for the death penalty.

But around that time too, people were protesting the death penalty, just like many do now.

So Andrew Jackson, prompted by these protests, granted George Wilson – the career criminal – a pardon.

Guess what happened? George Wilson declined the pardon. He wouldn't accept it.

So things got complicated, and this case was referred to the Supreme Court, which ruled the following:

**“A pardon is an act of grace, ...which exempts the individual on whom it is bestowed from the punishment the law inflicts for a crime he has committed. ... A pardon is ....not complete without acceptance. It may then be rejected by the person to whom it is tendered, and if it be rejected, we have discovered no power in a court to force it on him. It may be supposed that no being condemned to death would reject a pardon, but the rule must be the same in capital cases and in misdemeanors.”**

Further, Chief Justice John Marshall purportedly pronounced that the value of a pardon **“must be determined by the**

**receiver ... It has no value apart from that which the receiver gives it . . . therefore, George Wilson must die."**

I have no idea why George Wilson did not receive the pardon... accept the grace given to him. I have no clue. But the upshot was that...

Because he did not...George Wilson was subsequently executed for his crime. The pardon issued by the president of the United States had no value for him unless he received it. It was null and void.

Now why did I tell you this story? Because the three of you, who were just confirmed this morning have done the exact opposite of what George Wilson did.

### YOU HAVE MADE THE MOST IMPORTANT CHOICE OF YOUR LIFE

You have made the most important choice of your life standing here this morning...because it is a choice that will last for all eternity, not just for this world.

And that choice is to say **YES!** to Gods grace...to say YES to his pardon (cause we need it cause we have all messed up - we're all sinners)...to accept the gift of forgiveness and eternal life given freely to you through Jesus Christ by acknowledging him as your Lord and Saviour.

If you had been like George Wilson and rejected this free gift of grace and mercy, God's gift to you in Jesus Christ would have no value for you. **"A pardon is not complete without acceptance."** Said the court back in the 1830's and that is the same thing here.

Your choice, your decision to choose for Christ is all important. And that's all God asks for...an open door...a willing heart...a YES you can come in *choice* on your part. And when that happens all of heaven rejoices because suddenly the pardon, the grace, the love of God for you, can become activated in you life .

Its like those little dried out towels you can buy that are in cellophane packets. And they are all wrapped up in a little cube and they look like nothing, you know., But when you add water to the cube this thing morphs. It almost scarey, but you stick this thing that looks like nothing in water and... It grows into a towel – a towel you can actually use. Everything is there...its all been done for this purpose...but it needs water.

Your saying YES today to Christ...is like water dousing that towel. Your acceptance of Jesus allows you to morph into the person God wants you to be. Your choice of YES to Christ... activates God's grace in your life to help that happen.

God is love, so he will not force his grace on you. You must choose, and you have, and that is why we celebrate today.

And just so you know...I all of the heavenly host, is rejoicing as well. I think all of the heavenly host, sits eagerly on the edge of their seats, waiting, hoping, just longing for people to do what you three did today. Say YES! Receive the Lord, they whisper eagerly. Do it!

You heard the choir sing this morning...it was a song of victory and it's the last song in LES MIS. The title is DO YOU HEAR THE PEOPLE SING? But today I'd like to change the words...do you

hear the angels sing? Singing a song of victory...That's what's happening right now...

There's a line in that song that says, "They will live again in freedom in the garden of the Lord...They will walk behind the plowshare, they will put away the sword".

The last part about the plowshare and sword is a direct quote from scripture – in other words its not about how hard we work...its about God's grace doing it for us. And the garden...That's restoration of a right relationship with God – the kind we had in Eden. When we say YES to grace...our connection with God is restored because of Christ's gracious sacrifice for us. We are back in Eden, walking with God in closeness and in joy...

Les Mis is all about that grace. That's why I love that musical so much. So then...with all this good news about God's grace we have to ask the question...

### NOW WHAT?

So,,, *How should we then live*...now that we have accepted God's pardon,his grace What happens next? Do we do nothing. Sit back, relax and wait for heaven? Or does becoming a Christian mean that we don't swear, and we don't take drugs, and we don't drink, and we don't steal stuff from stores? That we become nice and respectable folks?

Is that what...accepting Christ means? Well in one way what is supposed to happen when we say YES to Jesus Christ is that we can be filled up not by things that destroy us, but by the Holy

Spirit who gives us life, and meaning and purpose the way nothing else can.

But saying YES to Christ is so much more than NOT DOING certain “bad” things. It really has nothing to do with being a “good church person/kid ” at all

You know what it has do with?

It has everything to do with growing in our love for God...and recognizing what we **CAN DO** ,now that we have said YES and are empowered by the Holy Spirit...Its all about ...looking up to God and saying “*Wow...you would pardon me? God of the universe? You want me to partner with you to make a difference in the world? You...God of wonders...beyond our galaxy...you want to forgive me and be in relationship with me? How exciting...how amazing...I am yours! Show me Lord how I can make a difference on this sorry planet for your glory.*”

Think about Jean Valjean in the movie

His life was changed after he experienced and said YES to God’s grace. He himself became gracious – and he made such a difference in peoples lives. He was merciful, and he took in a child that was not his own and raised her. He was kind to his workers, and saved his daughter’s fiancée’s life... he made a difference in a harsh world. It wasn’t easy for him...but because of the grace shown to him he was a changed man... and he became grace to others

That’s what we are called to do to when we say yes to Christ.

We have these core values that define our church and they are prefixed by some pretty extreme adjectives...they are..

**INTENTIONAL** Faith Development

**RADICAL** Hospitality

**RISK TAKING** Mission and Service

**EXTRAVAGANT** Generosity

**PASSIONATE** Worship

Why are they so extreme? Because that's the kind of God we worship. God has been extravagant, intentional, risk taking, passionate, radical in the way he has loved us. And he tells us ...make a difference by not just refraining from bad stuff, or doing what is reasonable...make a difference by going above and beyond...with grace.

Live generously...take the risk to love beyond what is reasonable...reach out and be radical about it because people need it...be passionate for the gospel...don't just live like everyone else.

Be an intentional, radical, risk taking, extravagant, passionate, difference maker in my name...and I will strengthen you, and I will uphold you, and you can trust me every step of the way...

The Christian life is so exciting when you really are living it the way God intended...it's the ride of a lifetime. Its not always easy...but its way fun and totally keeps you on the edge of your seat.

(IMAGE) Any of you ever go on that Jurassic Park ride at Universal Studios? (I think I may have mentioned this before) The gates open, the music is playing the theme song, and you're in this boat. And you float by all the animated dinosaurs and stuff...and then you get to the top and this huge Tyrannosaurus Rex is suddenly hovering over you ...and it opens its mouth (to gobble you alive) and you think you are going to be swallowed, and then the boat shoots down this steep incline and you scream, water splashed everywhere and in the end you are okay. Imagine that!

That's a ride that *I totally love* because at the end there, I was completely surprised by that drop. And it was a total blast.

The Christian life is like that. Full of surprises. Full of excitement because as you are being passionate, extravagant, risk taking and generous in sharing the gospel...trusting a God you know is there but who you can't see... you aren't always quite sure how He is going to work to fix a situation...you might get some clues along the way...but you aren't quite sure

You keep praying and you keep trusting...and you will find out throughout your lives – that if you do that... God always comes through and works it out.

Sometimes at the last minute, sometimes not the way we would do it, but he always comes through. And you get to be in partnership with the Creator of the Universe – and all that he is, gradually becomes more and more who you are. It's the ride of your life...

Its so exciting following this God who we can't tame, and who

we can't keep in a box, but who is always faithful and always comes through...

After Paul has done a profound analysis of God's grace in Romans 8...he ends with the very practical part that we read this morning...look it over...that now given who God is in his immeasurable grace ...this is then how we should live...

**“Be devoted to one another...let love be genuine...never lack in zeal...bless those who persecute you...if your enemy is hungry, feed him...do not be overcome with evil but overcome evil with good.**

Pretty radical, risk taking, generous, passionate stuff. That's how we are meant to live...after we say yes to grace...

### **God's Grace Will Lead You Home**

And finally, I'll leave you with this. When you live this way and you do fail, or mess up, or things don't quite go the way you had planned,..and you get discouraged... God is there with grace for you again.

The world of sports provides a beautiful picture of God's grace. We see it when the sportscaster shows "highlight reels" of our favorite athletes from years gone by. In the editing process, they extract the mistakes, the fumbles, the strike outs, the missed shots. Instead, every time someone shoots the ball, they make the basket, or they hit the ball and make the homerun. (IMAGE) If all you knew about these legends was what you saw from a "highlight reel," you'd think they never missed a shot!



And that's a picture of how our lives will be remembered in eternity. By God's grace, we are promised that our sins will not be remembered. God will edit them all out. In Isaiah 43:25 we read, "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more."

Why wouldn't someone say YES to God's pardon?

I don't have the foggiest idea.

I don't see how people live their lives without the mercy and grace and forgiveness of Jesus. What a gift his pardon is!

But you have said yes to him today and received grace upon grace.

God bless you in your journey to love him with all your heart, soul mind and strength...and go on the ride of your life serving him without fear...

Let's pray together...