

January 11, 2026

Paul Purdue preaching

When Lewis began playing organized soccer, I found myself coaching a gaggle of 4 and 5 year olds. I ordered "The Baffled Parents Guide to Coaching Soccer." Chapters like "Surviving Your First Practice", and "Make It Fun and Rewarding" inspired me. We had a great season. Assigned purple jerseys, we voted to be the Purple Pirates and little Emily, wore purple socks, purple shoe laces and a big purple bow in her hair, she was our fearless and fashion forward goal keeper. When the children struggled with throw-ins, I borrowed a Barney the Purple Dinosaur tune and made up motions: "*Plant your feet and throw it in, throw it in, throw it in, to your friend. Hands together over your head, straight over your head, over your head.*" With silly songs and orange slices the Purple Pirates had a blast. One evening, after a practice a mom approached: "*Coach, what does Skyler need to work on at home?*" I paused pondering the nature of "work" and "play". Stepping into my silence she added "*Skyler is always outside dribbling around cones, kicking balls off the house, and doing that juggling thing, but what does Skyler need to work on?*" I smiled, "*Nothing, just let him play!*" She let out a patronizing sigh, "*You're doing a great job, the kids adore you, we are undefeated, but what does Skyler need to work to improve his game?*" I said, "*Skyler is fast, a great teammate, smart, big foot, sees the field. One day, he may play soccer in high school, college, or who knows. If he keeps playing, he will spend thousands of hours working on his skills, but right now, the most important lesson is learning to have fun playing this beautiful game. If Skyler falls in love with soccer, then practice won't feel like work but fun!*"

Our culture twists everything into a competition: sports, dance, music, education, dating, housing, governing, faith, employment, and even vacations! Our desire to compete often strips away from the core value of an experience and steals our enjoyment. Carpenters talk about something "being out of true" or not being properly aligned. If the foundational angles are not lined up or true, everything in the house becomes less stable and more difficult. The Greek word for "sin" is "missing the mark" a kind of misaligned with God, ourselves and neighbors. Over the next four weeks we are talking about the foundational values we Methodists organize our life around- the guideposts along our discipleship pathway.

The Apostle Paul crows "*by God's grace, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, Jesus Christ, that others are building upon. Pay attention to the way you build!* (Adapted from 1 Corinthians 3) What is your foundation? What stepping stones are guiding your path?

When our spiritual ancestors built our sanctuary in 1927 they inscribed our cornerstone, “*Whose Foundation is Jesus Christ*”. Could we have a better cornerstoner? Jesus ends the Sermon On the Mount “*Everyone who hears these words and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who lays a foundation in the bedrock, because when life’s winds howl, the river rises, and the storms come (and they will come), such a house stands firm.* (Matthew 7)

Our foundation is Jesus Christ, but what is our foundational image of Jesus or God? We are made in the image of God! But, what is your image of God? (Genesis 1)

John’s Gospel begins with beautiful theological poetry, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. The Word was God. All things came into being through the Word... The Word was life and the light of all people.... And the Word became flesh and made a home among us, we have seen all of God’s glory in Jesus Christ, who is full of grace and truth, from Jesus Christ we receive grace upon grace.*”

Do you imagine God, as the source of everything, giver of life, ground of our being, light of all people as full of grace and truth? Can you imagine God making God’s home right in the middle of your life? What is your image of God?

For a long time, John Wesley, like most Christians, understood God as an angry judge, but Wesley experienced a conversion from judgement into grace. Grace became and is the foundation of Methodist theology.

In a sermon, “*The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption*” Wesley describes a conversion from being bound up in judgment to experiencing a boundless grace. (1 John 4) “*Our eyes are opened to see our loving gracious God... Heavenly, healing light breaks in upon our souls. We see the light of the glorious love of God in the face of Jesus Christ. ... Here ends both the guilt and the power of sin... Here ends all bondage to fear... We can no longer fear the wrath of God.... We can no longer look upon God as an angry judge, but as a loving father. We no longer fear the devil, hell or death. Because where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty... and the Spirit pours the love of God into our hearts, (and empowers us to) love of all humankind.*” (Adapted!)

Wesley preaches a heart-centric faith: emotional, psychological, mysterious, deeply personal, and very human. You might notice that our baptismal vows focus on experiences and behaviours more than many Christian confessions. Wesley's genius may be asking us “what is your image of God”? Do you see God as an exacting judge, carefully keeping score and inspecting your work, or a gracious, slow to anger, indulgent parent who simply delights in dwelling with us? Do we imagine God running

down the lane to embrace us, their prodigal children even before we admit our mistake or find our way back home? Do we imagine God leaving the 99 righteous sheep to go look for the one who has lost their way? Do we imagine God weeping over a sin-filled city? Do we imagine God washing our feet? Do we imagine God as Charles Wesley wrote “emptying themselves of all but love...” and embodying all our human sinfulness, suffering and sorrow on the cross? “*Amazing love, how can it be, that oh my God it found me?*” (Charles Wesley hymn “And Can it Be?”) Is your foundational image of God one of grace upon grace?

Grace is not just a New Testament idea. The Hebrew Bible tells the story of God, who may get agitated with humanity, but who never gives up on us. Hear the psalmist sing...

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
 bless God’s holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and do not forget all God’s benefits—
 who forgives all our iniquity,
 heals all our diseases,
 redeems our lives from the Pit,
 who crowns us with steadfast love and mercy,
Who satisfies us with good things
 lifts us up on eagles wings
Who works justice for all who are oppressed.
Who is merciful and gracious,
 slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
Who does not deal with us according to our sins
 or keep score of our iniquities.
For as high as heavens are above the earth,
 so high is God’s steadfast love towards us
As far as the east is from the west,
 so far does God casts our sins away from us.
As a father has compassion for their children,
 so the Lord has compassion for all who remember God. (Psalm 103)

I have never been crowned anything, not homecoming king, not math prom king, not burger king or any kind of king, but I love this image. God is not jotting down scores, critiquing our steps in some little notebook and then picking one Miss America- God

crowns each of us with steadfast love and mercy. Imagine God crowning you with love, mercy and grace upon grace.

Baptism of our Lord Sunday, is a foundational Sunday. We remember our foundational promises to God, each other, our neighbors and ourselves but we need to remember God's promises of grace, mercy and love to us. Today let us linger in grace, receiving from God grace upon grace.

*we are incorporated into God's mighty acts of salvation,
We are given new birth through water and the Spirit.
This is God's gift, offered to us without price.
God gives us freedom and power
We put our whole trust in Christ's grace...
We pledge to nurture one another
We strive to be a community of love and forgiveness
We ask God to pour out the Holy Spirit upon us...
Remember your baptism and be thankful*

As you feel that watery cross imprinted on your forehead or hand, imagine the "marvelous, infinite matchless grace of our Lord. Imagine God crowning you with grace, upon grace, upon grace. Amen.