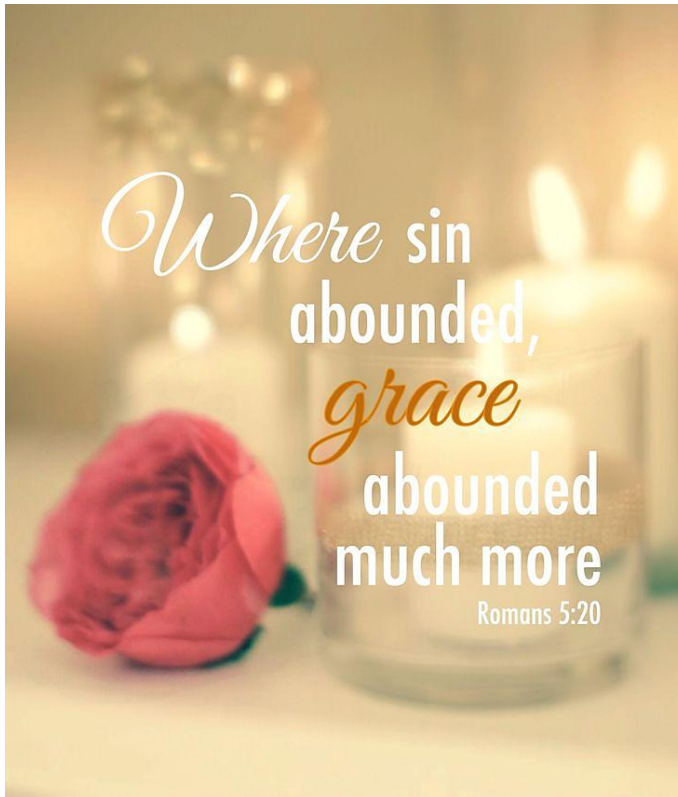


September 11, 2025



Dear Beloved Smith Chapel Family,

Over these past three days, our hearts have been shattered by one heartbreaking tragedy after another. Before we could even process the horror of a young woman from Ukraine brutally killed by a stranger on a train in Charlotte, North Carolina, we were struck again by the devastating news of a young man losing his life to gun violence at a university event in Utah—leaving behind his wife and two small children. Some of you, who have lived in this nation for many years, have lamented, *“What has our country*

become?” Resentment, fear, and despair are honest and natural responses to such horrendous evil sweeping across our land.

In moments like these, we are tempted to ask: *“What can we hold on to? Where is our hope? Where is this all going?”*

Hear the gospel truth: **“Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more”** (Romans 5:20). When we feel small, helpless, and like nothing at all, that is precisely the place where God’s grace springs forth. In our emptiness, He fills us. In our weakness, His strength abounds. In our despair, His grace breaks through like light in the darkness (cf. Gen. 1:1-3).

That is the meaning of **baptism**. We come with nothing—no merit, no power, no worthiness of our own. And yet, in that very water and Spirit, God pours out everything: His grace, His promises, and His eternal life in Jesus Christ. As Paul reminds us in Romans 6:1–11, we are united with Christ in His death and raised with Him into newness of life. What looks like nothing becomes everything in Him.

This is why Martin Luther, the great Reformer, whenever he felt tempted or afraid, would touch his forehead and say, “***I am baptized.***” Notice—he didn’t say, “*I was baptized,*” but “*I am baptized.*” For him, baptism was not just a memory—it was his identity. **And beloved, it is ours too.**

This week, as we carry both grief and hope, I want to invite you to two opportunities to gather as God’s family:

1. Praise Night – Friday at 7:30 PM (around the firepit)

Let us lift our broken hearts to the One who makes beauty from ashes. As the psalmist declares, “**Let us bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in our mouths**” (Psalm 34:1).

2. Baptism Service for Stoja Salvador – Sunday at 10:00 AM

Together we will witness the beautiful truth of the gospel as little **Stoja** comes to the waters and God surrounds her with everything she will ever need for eternal life. We will also remember our own baptism, trusting that in Christ our nothingness becomes the very place where His everything breaks in.

Beloved, though we may feel stretched thin and helpless under the weight of this world’s pain, let us remember: **Christ has overcome sin and death.** So let us gather around the **fire** and the **water**, longing for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and remembering our baptism. Bring your broken hearts. Bring your nothingness to God. For “**The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise**” (Psalm 51:17).

O Lord, have mercy on us.

Come empty vessels, God wants to fill you!

Shalom Shalom,
Pastor Ho