



ransforming times



Grace
December 2010

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The sun. The moon. The air I breathe. The stars that come out at night. The singing cactus wren. The eagle's soaring flight. The monsoon rains. The sunset skies. The snow on distant mountains. This very day and ones that came before. The changing of the seasons. My mother's love. My children's smiles. My husband's gorgeous eyes. The joy of laughter. The passing of fear. My very life. These are things I didn't earn or buy or work for. Yet, they are mine. Gifts freely given.

Grace is an unearned, even undeserved gift. Grace doesn't come through acts of human will. Acceptance of grace can enlarge and enrich your world, making it richer, deeper, and fuller. Though we can't bring about grace through human volition – no one of us can make the sun rise, after all – we can create an opening for grace to appear by cultivating an attitude of gratitude.

The parable of the prodigal son is a story of undeserved grace. A father has two sons with whom he divides his fortune equally. One son stays at home with his father, working to tend the herds and crops. The other goes out into the world, squandering his fortune before returning home, hungry and penniless. Upon seeing his returned son, the father is filled with compassion. He greets the son with a warm robe, rings for his fingers, and sandals for his feet. He ordered the fatted calf to be killed so there could be a feast of celebration.

The wandering son protested, feeling undeserving. The son who had stayed at home protested in anger. To him, the father said, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and was found."

There are a great many alive in our world today, who like the righteous son, believe their wealth and abundance is earned, and therefore deserved. Like the righteous son,

they can't see their own privilege, can't see how much has been given to them.

On the other hand, there are a great many alive today, who like the prodigal son, believe themselves unworthy and undeserving of even the basic necessities of life. Because of past mistakes or unfortunate circumstances, like being born into poverty, they resign themselves to lives of misery.

It is true that there are those whose fortunes have been made through hard work. And there are those for whom the cards are so stacked against them, they alone cannot reverse their fortunes.

In the parable, both the righteous son and the prodigal son have their eyes opened to the greater gift: their father's love and compassion, equally available to both.

The winter holidays are a time of celebration, a time for the giving and receiving of gifts. The holidays are a time for remembering family, whether near or far or estranged. For some, the absence of a loved one at the holiday table is a reminder of loss. It may sound trite – but sometimes things sound trite because they are true – the counting of blessings opens the way for grace to appear, opening our eyes to the gifts of life that we did not make, nor did we earn.

May this season of mystery and miracle embrace you in a spirit of grace.

Yours,
Diane

Served in Grace

When I looked up grace online this is what came up:

1. Seemingly effortless beauty or charm of movement, form, or proportion.
2. A characteristic or quality pleasing for its charm or refinement.
3. A disposition to be generous or helpful; goodwill. (*Grace*)

Look around the church at all that has been and is being done with grace. Every moment that you spend at church is made possible by the grace of others. Did you know that someone comes to the church a couple of times each week to water plants? Are you aware that we have a group of teachers that teach our children on Sundays and beyond, even taking them on field trips? Did you ever wonder how all of those coffee hour goodies end up on the table in Goddard after every service? Did you know that our nursery staff takes care of the smallest among us so that their parents can attend programming knowing that their children are safe and well cared for? Everywhere you look, we are being served with grace.

This is the kind of grace that is seemingly effortless, beautiful, charming and refined. They are services given, not because we have earned or otherwise deserve them. They are given because the people giving them have “a disposition to be generous or helpful”. These people have a sense of goodwill toward all they meet. From the ET committee to the RE Council and all the committees and volunteers in between, these are people who serve quietly, diligently, compassionately and with grace.

It is fitting to say then that if not for grace, our church community would not be a place where we all feel safe, welcomed, and ministered to. Without grace, there would be no community. So I ask you, the next time you are at church enjoying coffee hour or lunch, admiring the landscaping, enjoying a worship service or program, stop for a moment to give thanks for the grace that has made it possible for you to be in that very moment.

"Grace - Definition of Grace by the Free Online Dictionary, Thesaurus and Encyclopedia." Dictionary, Encyclopedia and Thesaurus - The Free Dictionary. Web. 16 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/grace>>.

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Transforming Times is organized around theological themes. Each theme plays a part in the development of a well-grounded religious and spiritual life. The church's offerings are by no means limited to the themes. They do provide common ground for Community conversation, a way to gain more meaning and depth. We want to hear many perspectives on each theme. You are invited to submit your original poetry, artwork, or short essays of 400 words or less. Be warned: seriously engaging these themes could transform your life!

September: Vision
October: Trust
November: Community
December: Grace
January: Stewardship

February: Justice
March: Hope
April: Credo
May: Ritual
June: Beauty