

“Grace Gifts”

John 1:16

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Communion Devotion

It has been called Christianity’s best gift to the world, grace. As a matter of fact, C. S. Lewis believed it is Christianity’s unique contribution among world religions. Grace is the foundation upon which our faith has been built and everything we believe must include its influence and be shaped by it. When it is ignored, the result is anything but Christian and anyone’s story except Jesus’.

As Philip Yancey writes in his book, What’s So Amazing About Grace?, “The world thirsts for grace in ways it does not even recognize.” Why? What is so special about grace and why do we need it?

Grace reminds us that the best things in life come from others, God, family, friends, and even strangers. The things I need the most I cannot produce. And what are these things? Companionship, encouragement, blessing, instruction, guidance, security, strength, courage, confidence, faith, hope, love and forgiveness. These gifts and many more must come from the gracious and loving hands of others, beginning with God. This is why John’s words about Jesus speak to me so powerfully, “From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.”

Isn’t it amazing how much we know we need others as infants and children only to convince ourselves that we can go it alone later in life? At what age do we switch gears? What makes us think we can all of a sudden be self-sufficient?

Grace reminds us that the best things in life come from others. It keeps us humble and receptive. It prevents us from falling on our face and sinking into despair.

You recall the secret of the redwood trees’ strength and tenacity, don’t you? They grow in clusters. Their shallow roots intertwine. To knock one down the wind would have to blow all of them down. Their survival depends upon staying close to one another and so does ours.

Grace reminds us that the best things in life come from others and come when we need them the most. They come when our resources have been depleted and we are weak. They come when we are weary with carrying a heavy load of guilt, shame, fear, confusion, grief, stress and worry. They even come when we are weary with well-doing and want to walk away from noble causes or success.

How many times has someone shown up in our life “just when we needed them most?” They stood in front of us with a warm casserole or a paint brush in their hand. They readily offered a comforting hug and a helping hand. You may have forgotten a thousand gifts that you did not need or want but I dare say you have never forgotten those timely and precious gifts, have you? Grace knows that unexpected gifts bring the greatest pleasure and meet the most urgent needs.

Grace reminds us that at times the best things in life come from others when we deserve them the least. Grace knows when we have been our worst we need help the most. It stubbornly refuses to let guilt and shame take up permanent residence in our heart because it knows it is possible to “create a new heart and renew a right spirit within

us.” Perhaps this is the time, when we are at our lowest, that God and others do their best work with the most visible results.

Bob Smith and Bill Wilson are the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous. After devising their twelve step program, they went to see a prominent attorney that had flunked out of eight separate detox programs in six months. They shared their own stories of addiction and the hope they discovered with the help of a Higher Power. As soon as they mentioned God, the attorney shook his head and sadly said, “No, no. It’s too late for me. I still believe in God all right, but I know mighty well that He doesn’t believe in me anymore.”

Nothing could be farther from the truth. What loving parent would ever give up on his or her child? Grace would never allow it!

The choir did a beautiful job earlier in the service singing John Newton’s hymn, *Amazing Grace*. You know this song was written by a man whose life was radically changed by God’s grace and others’ help. He was transformed from a slave trader to a Gospel preacher and the impact of that change is felt each time this sacred hymn is sung.

As we receive communion this morning, I challenge you to do two things. Ask God to help you receive the gifts of grace that He and others are trying to give you. And then ask Him to help you share your own grace gifts with those around you. Doing both will transform your life, too.