

NEW HORIZONS

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Theme Based Ministry Newsletter of the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto

GRACE

I do not at all understand the mystery of grace - only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us.
- Anne Lamott

What are we talking about, when we speak of grace?

In the English language there are several meanings, which at first glance may appear to be unrelated. We speak of being graceful: that is, moving with elegance or ease. We admire those who exhibit grace under pressure: the ability to navigate difficult situations without adding additional stress. We appreciate grace periods of extra time to finish a project or answer an email.

Then, too, we're aware of grace in the religious context. "The grace of God" is understood as the unearned gift from beyond ourselves, the unmerited blessing. At the beginning of a meal, many people "say grace," offering a simple prayer of gratitude for food.

The word grace—like the word gratitude—derives from the Latin *gratus*, meaning "pleasing, welcome or agreeable." In all the ways we may use the word, whether overtly religious or not, we connect with that which benefits and sustains us, that which supports life.

We may be able to approach an understanding of grace at low points in our lives: when assistance comes from an unexpected source or when we experience moments of peace during times of challenge—the coronavirus pandemic, for example.

As the writer Anne Lamott suggests, grace is something that changes us for the better, and it always may be somewhat mysterious. We may not need to understand (or precisely define) it...but when we notice grace with humility and thankfulness, we invite more of it into our lives.

I hope that this month's collection of readings and reflection questions will bring grace to you in the coming days.

Love,
Lynn

Questions to Live With



1. When have you experienced moments of grace, either recently or at other times in your life?
2. How did an experience of grace change you?
3. Where do you see grace in the world right now, and where does it seem to be missing?
4. What leads to grace, or where does it come from, in your experience?
5. How can I show more kindness and grace to myself? How can I extend this kindness and grace to others?

For Inspiration

Despite all its theological baggage, at its core the idea of grace simply celebrates a gift. Or maybe it's more accurate to say, it celebrates the giftedness of life. The deepest and most sacred experience of joy comes from encountering a gift you didn't expect, earn, create, or even deserve. And who of us hasn't been a recipient of that kind of gift?

- Shawn Newton

Grace has been defined as the outward expression of the inward harmony of the soul.

- William Hazlitt

We are cups, constantly and quietly being filled. The trick is, knowing how to tip ourselves over and let the beautiful stuff out.

- Ray Bradbury

Grace has to be the loveliest word in the English language. It embodies almost every attractive quality we hope to find in others. Grace is a gift of the humble to the humiliated. Grace acknowledges the ugliness...by choosing to see beyond it. Grace accepts a person as someone worthy of kindness despite whatever grime or hard-shell casing keeps him or her separated from the rest of the world. Grace is a gift of tender mercy when it makes the least sense.

- Charles R. Swindoll

Even when muddy your wings sparkle bright wonders that heal broken worlds.

- Aberjhani

Grace...might not always look the way you want it to. It will invite you out in the open and it will also reveal what has been broken. You might have to unlearn the way you thought things would be.

You might find that being undone is the best way to move on, humbly, mindfully, wholly. For how liberating it is to pursue wholeness over perfection, finding that grace is more than a beautiful word, but a daily act of being undone, an awakening, a direction.

- Morgan Harper Nichols

Gifts of grace come to all of us. But we must be ready to see and willing to receive these gifts. It will require a kind of sacrifice, the sacrifice of believing that, however painful our losses, life can still be good — good in a different way than before, but nevertheless good...I lost the world I loved, but I gained a deeper awareness of grace. That grace has enabled me to clarify my purpose in life and rediscover the wonder of the present moment.

- Jerry Sittser

We let go into this grace. It's something we fall into, like when we fall into the arms of another, or we put our head on the pillow to go to sleep. It's a willingness to relax, even in the midst of tension. It's a willingness to stop for just a moment, to breathe, to notice that there's something else going on other than the story our mind is telling us. In this moment of grace, we see that whatever might be there in our experience, from the most difficult emotional challenges to the most causeless joy, occurs within a vast space of peace, of stillness, of ultimate well-being.

- Adyashanti

Consider your life –
who you love, and why,
how blessed you are to be here, resting
under a shower of birdsong,
or what strange bright luck it is to be the owner,
for a few years, of this beating heart,
these wondering eyes, the ears
into which the kingfisher spills her small chuckle
as she dips across the water.

- Kathleen McTigue, "Summer Sabbath"

Grace incites insight, in sights unseen
permeating the exoskeletal remains
of our self-destruction
reconstructed in spiral staircases of whimsy
- PrttyBrd, "In Appreciation of Her Truth"

Here is what I know about grace. I know sun breaking through clouds and calling me out of my spiral of worries. I know stars splashed extravagantly across an expanse of dark night sky reminding me that my life is really rather small and fleeting in the grand scheme of things. I know the weight of a sleepy, contented baby in my arms inviting me to rest in the beauty of a moment. I know the kindness of a friend reaching across the miles to soothe my wounded spirit. I know the beauty of a match lighting a candle in the midst of the dark winter, illuminating a table with enough. I know the warm embrace that comes sometimes...in our [worship service] when something in the music or the prayer or the ritual or the silence catches us just right and it is clear that we are all right here, together in crafting something that is truly of worth. Grace...cannot be controlled...I can't will it into being when I need it. I can't conjure it for myself or

for anyone else. It cannot be bought or commanded or bargained into being. Grace works on its own terms, terms that are utterly mysterious to us. Grace comes when it comes.

- UU Minister

In community we are meant to grace one another; to be sources of grace; healers by way of grace.

- Matthew Fox



Sometimes [grace is] a state of being. Like a dancer lost in the flow, sometimes we are so attuned to and accepting of life's currents that everything suddenly feels like a gift.

- *Soul Matters Worship Resource*

[Know] how to listen, how to pay attention to the small moments of life where grace in fact breaks through...Sometimes...God comes not in the whirlwind but in the still small voice of our ordinary moments.

- Doug Thorpe

If, throughout these grace-given days of ours, surrounded as we are by green life and brown death, hot pink joy and cold gray pain and miracles—always miracles—
If we stay inside ourselves and do not venture out then the Fullness of the universe shall be unknown to us
And our locked hearts shall never feel the rush of worship.

- Marni Harmony, "If We Do Not Venture Out"

Sometimes I need only to stand wherever I am to be blessed.

- Mary Oliver

What I see everywhere in the world are ordinary people willing to confront despair, power, and incalculable odds in order to restore some semblance of grace, justice, and beauty to this world.

- Paul Hawken

I am greater than I knew.
This frail and vulnerable
little biped
has roots in the stars,
and boundless black space.
I am the effect
of invisible cause
that I can sense,
and feel, and express,
but I can never see.
I dance with the galaxies,
and swirl with the suns,
as I sit at the breakfast table,
eating my cornflakes.

- Don C. Nix, "Grace: A Relationship with the Cosmos"



Upcoming Services

Sun Feb 7, 10:30 – Black History Month
Many speakers

Sun Feb 7, 1:30 – CUC "Sharing our Faith" National Service

Sun Feb 14, 10:30 – All Kinds of Love
Rev. Shawn Newton

Sun Feb 21, 10:30 – Voices from Across Unitarian
Universalism
Visiting Minister

Sun Feb 28, 10:30 – Force Majeure
Rev. Shawn Newton

Join a Journey Group

Journey Groups are the best way to go deeper with our monthly theme by sharing with a small group of people for a couple of hours each month. Groups meet online on Zoom and are scheduled at different times during the month. For more information, visit our website <https://firstunitariantoronto.org/journey-groups/>, or look for the link in First Light.

Upcoming Monthly Themes

March: Patience | April: Acceptance | May: Truth & Lies | June: Time

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First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto



Seek • Connect • Serve

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