



Theme Based Ministry Newsletter of the Unitarian Church of Calgary  
Volume 2, Issue 13 • October 2015

## ***What Does It Mean to Be a People of Grace?***

Grace is not a word that you hear very often in UU congregations. Grace is a theological concept we left behind, or grew out of, or were wounded by. We are uncomfortable with the old words: “to be saved by grace alone.” They sound to us like a prescription for passivity. And don’t even get us started on the idea that we “need grace.” We are so done with the argument about whether or not we are hopeless sinners who need our dark souls wiped clean.

But grace is too good a word, too useful a concept, to be abandoned by us. At the heart of the idea of grace, is the idea of thankfulness. We have received things that we did not deserve or earn. It is time to quit arguing over where we received these things from. We need to graciously accept the gifts.

Grace was chosen as our theme for October because of the celebration of Thanksgiving during this month. Despite all its theological baggage, at its core the acceptance of grace simply celebrates a gift. Or maybe it’s more accurate to say, it accepts the giftedness of life.

Reclaiming the word “grace” is our way as Unitarian Universalists of saying thanks! It’s our way of humbly and gratefully acknowledging that when we are at the end of our ability, or of our rope, life has ways of surprising us. It’s our way of acknowledging the astounding fact that no matter how tragic or bleak things get, the bad simply can’t shut out all the good, the dark need not squeeze out all the light.

Whether your personal theology leans theist or atheist (or somewhere in between), all of us find common ground around celebrating the gifts we didn’t expect, create or deserve. Whereas once we fought about who is the giver of grace and whether or not there even was one, we have no problem being satisfied with simply coming together to celebrate the gift. And not just celebrating it, but giving it a little bit of help as well.

Grace has a lot to do with serendipity. Just as serendipity happens, when we practice the art of careful observation and allow our curiosity to lead us, so too grace happens when we are open to its gifts. While we can’t control it, we can collude with it. The rules of grace involve more than us just sitting back and waiting for grace to happen. We are asked to be open, to let go of our precious and preferred plans, and accept the gift in whatever form it comes. We are also asked to be “givers of grace.” Yes, grace frequently does its work in spite of us, but more often than not it finds a way of working through us, if we let it.

That is what this month is all about: asking ourselves what we need to do to enable grace to flow more freely. So what is your “grace work”? Looking around? Letting go? Trusting more? Accepting whatever comes? Sneaking a gift into someone’s life without them knowing it? Forgiving someone when they don’t deserve it? Joyful work indeed!

Namaste, Debra

### **October Services: Sunday 10:30**

**October 4<sup>th</sup>  
For the Love of Grace**

**October 11<sup>th</sup>  
Hope Fuelled by Grace**

**October 18<sup>th</sup>  
Reflections on a Road Less  
Travelled**

**October 25<sup>th</sup>  
Grace Like a Mighty Stream**

# REFLECTIONS

# GRACE

## Upcoming Services

*\*All services are Sunday mornings at 10:30am\**

**October 4th**

**For the Love of Grace**

Grace may be a theological concept we left behind, or grew out of, or were wounded by, the concept though is very worth the deepening of our understanding and perhaps embrace. Grace is too good a word, too useful a concept, to be abandoned by us.

Presenter: Rev Debra Faulk  
Musician: Jane Perry, Music Director

**October 11th**

**Hope Fuelled by Grace**

At the heart of the idea of grace, is the idea of thankfulness. Grace was chosen as our theme for October in part because of the celebration of Thanksgiving during this month. At its core the acceptance of grace simply celebrates a gift. Or maybe it's more accurate to say, it accepts the gift-  
edness of life.

Presenter: Rev Debra Faulk  
Musician: Jane Perry, Music Director with UUphonia

**October 18th**

**Reflections on a Road Less Travelled**

Reflections on a Road Less Travelled

A sympathetic look at the contemplative/mystical tradition, the path of the heart.

Presenter: Carl Svoboda  
Musician: Guest Pianist

**October 25th**

**Grace Like a Might Stream**

The invitation this month is to be agents of grace, to be in some way an unexpected gift to the world, to give of ourselves to the greater whole. What we give to in many ways is a statement of who we are, certainly reflects what is important to us.

Presenter: Rev Debra Faulk  
Musician: Jane Perry, Music Director with UUphonia

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## October's Spiritual Exercise

*Give Grace a Hand!*

Grace doesn't just surprise us; it also often invites us to be part of the surprise. It's sneaky that way. It likes to enlist us as its partner-in-crime. This exercise asks us to explore that more deeply—it asks us to notice how we are both givers and receivers of grace.

Simply put, your challenge is to **find a way to bring grace to someone's life**. That may seem simple, but there is one big, challenging rule you must follow: **\*They can't know you were involved!** Your task is not to do a "good deed." It is to help someone experience life differently. The goal is to remind someone that *life itself* is generous, not stingy; open, not closed; full of surprises, not full of threats. If they know you are involved, it will only convince them that you are a good guy or gal. Your goal is to convince them that "life is good!"

Here is some inspiration to help you:

- Grace can be as simple as picking up some trash on the street and putting it into a garbage can. The next person walking by doesn't have to see it, and will never know that you made the world a little nicer for everyone.
- Gregory Clark, the Canadian author and humourist recommended hiding stacks of pennies outside where children were likely to find them. You might want to move up to nickels or dimes.
- When walking, watch for expired parking meters. If you find one, put in a quarter, or Loonie, and leave a note on the windshield. (This is totally illegal, but don't let that stop you.)
- There is more than one way to be anonymous. If you are brave enough, try initiating a cheerful conversation with a total stranger or maybe just offer a few cheerful words.
- You can be an agent of grace for other species as well. A simple bird feeder makes you an agent of grace.

Think about how you would answer these questions:

1. Is the idea of remaining anonymous appealing or would you rather vicariously experience the recipient's joy?
2. Do some people, or some animals for that matter, deserve grace more than others? You might put out a bird feeder, but would you put out a mouse feeder or a spider feeder?
3. In what way could being an agent of grace be a spiritual experience for you?
4. Would you have any problems receiving a gift from an anonymous person?

### Alternate Exercises:

1. Think of Your Best Grace Story: Treat this as an opportunity to express gratitude for the grace that has blessed your life, but also choose a story that taught you something significant about grace. How did this experience make you think about grace differently? How has the experience helped you more easily notice grace and open to it?
2. Take Up "Grace Watching": As a way of reminding yourself of life's giftedness, spend a week documenting the number of times you see grace in action.
3. Give Your Schedule over to Grace: Put your To-Do List down for a day. Ignore your schedule. Commit to giving up all plans or expectations. Simply spend the day letting grace guide your agenda. Treat it as an experiment, testing the hypothesis that grace and giftedness is all around and wants to lure you in.

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## Questions to Live With

*As has become our practice, be sure to engage these questions in advance of your group meeting and find the one that “hooks” you most. Then let it take you on an adventure. Live with it for the entire month. Allow it to break into—and break open—your ordinary thoughts. And then come to your Journey Group meeting prepared to share that experience with your group.*

1. Have you closed yourself off from grace because you are uncomfortable with the word? No one will object to you criticizing the way the concept of grace has been misused. But are you sure you want to keep criticizing? Rather than reclaim it?
2. Are you ticked off at grace? It can be arbitrary. Not showing up when you need it most. How are you doing at “forgiving grace”? How are you doing at accepting the fact that it comes and goes like the wind? Or shows up in forms different than you had hoped?
3. Is grace asking for your help? Grace rarely does everything on its own. It enlists us as its partner. Have you noticed that neighbor or co-worker who feels cut off? Or who is convinced that life is no longer on her side? Have you missed the invitation to help?
4. Do you consider yourself “graceful”? Grace is not always something we receive or give. Sometimes it’s 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. When was the last time you danced through life gracefully? What’s keeping you from doing it right now?
5. Is grace trying to get you to let go? Sometimes we cut ourselves off from grace by doggedly pursuing our own plans and preferences? Keeping your eyes on the prize can be noble, unless it’s blinding you to the real gift sitting in the other corner of the room? Do you need to let go of what you want in order to notice the unexpected thing grace is trying to give?
6. Are you here because of grace? Have you given grace its due? Or stole all the credit? We all like to tell the story of our lives as if we pulled ourselves up by our own bootstraps. It’s a delicious temptation to tell the story that way. Here is your chance to tell a more grateful – and grace-full - story.
7. Do you believe in grace? Every religion has its way of declaring that grace is always there, that no tragedy, defeat or evil is so large that it eliminates grace entirely. Do you believe this? Do you agree that grace is always there, if only we were willing to look? Maybe the bigger question is, “Do you WANT to believe?” Is restoring your faith in grace the work you need to do right now?

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## For Inspiration

*As always, the following texts are not “required reading.” We will not analyze or dissect these pieces in our groups. They are simply meant to spark your reflections—and maybe open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to “live in and with Grace.”*

## Resources

**Online** - Giving is the Best Communication: This one’s about grace and gratitude, giving without expectation of any return. <http://www.karmatube.org/videos.php?id=4443>

...this is about an unexpected gift to an artist. [http://www.ted.com/talks/phil\\_hansen\\_embrace\\_the\\_shake?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/phil_hansen_embrace_the_shake?language=en)

**Books** - Grace Eventually by Anne Lamott

Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith by Kathleen Norris

Addiction and Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions by Gerald May

Beginners Grace: Bringing Prayer to Life by Kate Braestrup

The Unmistakable Touch of Grace by Cheryl Richardson

What the Body Wants: From Creators of Interplay by Cynthia Winton-Henry

Radical Gratitude by Mary Jo Leddy

**Movies** - Amelie The rarest of cinematic rarities – a schmaltz-free feelgooder which doesn't just make you feel good, but reminds you that love [and grace] exist and can be found in even the most mundane of places.”

### Tree of Life

A metaphysical, yet narrative film about the way of the world through grace or nature. Read an article about it Here: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/13.7/2011/08/17/139680194/thetree-of-life-need-we-choose-between-grace-and-nature>

### Man Who Learned to Fall

A documentary about a man dying of ALS proves that grace abounds in the process of letting go and preparing for death. <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/films.php?id=10191>

### Holes

An imaginative children's film traces a boy's journey in the desert where he keeps experiencing coincidences and where hints of grace shower down upon him at a place called God's Thumb.

### Forrest Gump

A feel good story about a man who gave and received abundant grace. Get Ready for November’s Theme: Integrity!

## Your Notes:



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## Quotes to Inspire an Experience of Grace

The winds of grace are always blowing, but you have to raise the sail.

- Ramakrishna

Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. It strikes us when we walk through the dark valley of a meaningless and empty life. It strikes us when we feel that our separation is deeper than usual, because we have violated another life, a life which we loved, or from which we were estranged. It strikes us when our disgust for our own being, our indifference, our weakness, our hostility, and our lack of direction and composure have become intolerable to us. It strikes us when year, after year, the longed for perfection of life does not appear, when the old compulsion reign within us as they have for decades, when despair destroys all joy and courage. Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks into our darkness. If that happens to us, we experience grace. After such an experience, we may not be better than before, and we may not believe more than before. But everything is transformed. - Paul Tillich

Grace is the ability to redefine the boundaries of possibility. - Manning Marable

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

- Matthew Fox

Grace is "a powerful force that exists outside human consciousness and nurtures the spiritual growth of human beings." - M. Scott Peck *The Road Less Traveled*

On a day when the wind is perfect, the sail just needs to open and the world is full of beauty. On a day when the wind is perfect, the sail just needs to open and the love starts. Today is such a day. Grace breaks through. Grace fills the open sail, and brings transforming love. Grace is not so amazing. Grace is not so rare. Grace is everyday. Today is such a day. - Rumi

"For me, every hour is grace. And I feel gratitude in my heart each time I can meet someone and look at his or her smile." - Elie Wiesel

When despair for the world grows in me and I wake in

the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be, I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds. I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water. And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light. For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free. - Wendell Berry

Faith cannot be made: it is in the truest sense a gift of grace. - Carl Jung

It is only when you have both divine grace and human endeavor that you can experience bliss, just as you can enjoy the breeze of a fan only when you have both the fan and the electrical energy to operate it. - Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Some hae meat and canna eat,  
And some would eat that want it;  
But we hae meat, and we can eat,  
Sae let the Lord be thankit.

Grace before Meat - Robert Burns "The Selkirk Grace"

All is waiting and all is work;

All is change and all is permanence. All is grace.

- Barbara Grizzuti Harrison, from *Foreign Bodies* (1984)

The state of love is the state of grace. - N. Sri Ram

The daily bread of grace, without which nothing can be achieved, is given to the extent to which we ourselves give and forgive. - Aldous Huxley

The *Thou* meet me through grace - it is not found by seeking. - Martin Buber

I'm becoming more and more myself with time, I guess that's what grace is, the refinement of your soul through time. - Jewel

Grace isn't a little prayer before a meal. It's a way to live. - Jacqueline Winspear, edited

Grace is accepting what is instead of resenting what isn't (Anon)

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## Grace-Full Children Come from Grace-Filled Homes

Grace, is caught by children- not taught to children. Nurturing our personal spirits in the midst of raising our kids and making a living, is one of the most significant gifts we can give to our children. Nurturing our spirit grounds us in our life and keeps us awake and alert to the gifts of grace in our midst. Children catch the grace we experience, the grace we savour, the grace that fills us; we cannot help but share grace with those we live with. May our homes be blessed by abundant grace this month as we pay attention to the grace that abounds in our lives.

-Shannon Mang DRE

### ***The Chalice of Our Being***

Meditation

By Richard S. Gilbert

*"Each morning we must hold out the chalice of our being to receive, to carry, and give back."*—  
Dag Hammarskjold

Each morning we hold out our chalice of being  
To be filled with the graces of life that abound—  
Air to breathe, food to eat, companions to love,  
Beauty to behold, art to cherish, causes to serve.

They come in ritual procession, these gifts of life.  
Whether we deserve them we cannot know or  
say, For they are poured out for us.  
Our task is to hold steady the chalice of our being.

We carry the chalice with us as we go,  
Either meandering aimlessly,  
Or with destination in our eye.

We share its abundance if we have any sense,  
Reminding others as we remind ourselves  
Of the contents of the chalice we don't deserve.  
Water from living streams fills it

If only we hold it out faithfully.

We give back, if we can, something of ourselves—

Some love, some beauty, some grace, some gift.

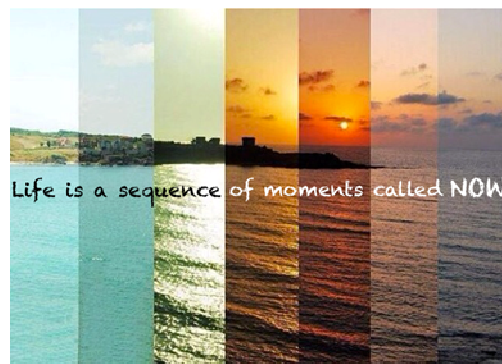
We give back in gratitude if we can

Something like what is poured into our chalice of being—

For those who abide with us and will follow.

Each morning we hold out the chalice of our being,  
To receive, to carry, to give back.

Source: "In the Holy Quiet" <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/chalice-our-being>



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## Looking Ahead

### Themes for 2015-2016

September - **Promise**

October - **Grace**

November - **Integrity**

December - **Wonder**

January - **Resilience**

February - **Reconciliation**

March - **Renewal**

April - **Revelation**

May - **Tradition**

June - **Revelry**

### Theme Based Listening Circles (TLCs)

You are invited to deepen your experience of the monthly theme by participating in a facilitated small group. These groups meet once a month, usually in the later part of the month to allow time to be with the theme, at various times and places in the city. If you are interested in a group, either as a facilitator or participant, please send an inquiry [tlc@unitarianscalgary.org](mailto:tlc@unitarianscalgary.org)

Current times and places include:

3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday - 7:00 - 9:00

3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday - 1:00 - 3:00

4<sup>th</sup> Friday - 10:00 - noon - Unitarian Church

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday noon - 2:00 - Unitarian Church of Calgary

The content for these packets is a group effort. We welcome submissions of your ideas of readings, stories, videos, visual images, questions, and spiritual exercises for each month's topic. While not everything will make it into this collection, it is useful for our worship team and our group facilitators. You can send submissions for any theme anytime - for October's theme of "Grace" by September 15<sup>th</sup>, to [debra@unitarianscalgary.org](mailto:debra@unitarianscalgary.org).

Reflections



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*Thanks to all who contributed and deep appreciation to:  
the Canadian Unitarian Congregations participating in the thematic ministry sharing circle, 8  
and Rev. Scott Tayler's Soul Matters Sharing Circle.*