

Amazing Grace - Finding us in the lost ness of our Hurried Living

God's Amazing Grace - made known to us in Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Lord and Savior. It is our Lenten Theme - and a timely one. For all the grit and creativity of our country, for all our success and rise to world Power, there is very little ease or deep comfort in our country these days. Nor is there - is there? - in our lives.

I think we feel, many of us, harried and hurried, even harassed by the pace of life, by things, by stuff, by situations - more than we feel calm and confident and at ease about our lives. And none of our remedies for our dis - ease work for long. The cruise vacation we plan - locks us down with a ship's virus. Fly instead - and spend a couple hours on a runway, or get bumped for a night in Mexico City or Newark Your dog's food has been recalled, maybe your car, too. You missed a patch and your computer is still on winter time - and you need a rest - for body mind and soul.

And you know what, none of this, thank God, is new to God. God knows every fateful and fiendish choice we make and path we take in life. And that should make you glad and not mad.

I know the mad at God part. God - Why the stern tests of this world, Lord? Why suicide bombers? Why Jew haters and black baiters, and hispanic haters? Why Lord, such a sinful lot of folk? And God says, listen - God says, because I love you. Because I love you. I have given you choice, I have and I will show you the way. But - you must take it. You must take it.

This week we look at God's grace finding us in the lost ness of our hurried living. And we have all been there - we are there. In the rush and hurry. But even there, even then, God finds us. I pray you've found God finding you - in the rush of your life - and if not there and then, maybe here and now in this hour of worship.

Please pray with me.

Slow us down, Lord. We have not just today or tomorrow to please you, but all of life, beyond time and space. By your grace, help us hear and heed your word to us this day, and find our rest in the gift of your grace in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

God's Amazing Grace - for facing our temptations, for overcoming our blindnesses and our fears - and finding us in the lostness of our hurried living. What are you living for? What are you running so fast after, working so hard to achieve? What are you living for?

A counselor began to use this question to begin and end his work with his clients. If you know that, he found, if you know what you are living for, then, and really, only then, can you make good sense out of what happens to you, or you cause to happen in your life. And only then can you respond effectively.

If there is a truth about grace that does not change, it is that grace is freely offered, but received only when its welcomed. Grace may be a key, the key, to a good life. But God doesn't give us grace we aren't a bit greedy for. And the words Marjorie read from the Psalm point up again the power of God's word to speak to our world = Listen.

I sought the Lord, and he answered me. The poor soul cried and was heard by the lord.

And for all the marvelous teaching in the parable of the Prodigal son - or better - the loving parent - these lines stand out for me. He came to himself. He came to himself. And the Apostle Paul wrote - Christ died so that we no longer live for ourselves, but for him - for the living Christ.

For the psalmist, for the prodigal son, for Paul, before grace can be found, grace needs to be needed. Before the sick can be cured they need to know they are sick. Before we can be saved, we need to know we are lost.

I was five I think, maybe not quite. And my friend Danny and I went on an adventure. We started out getting some supplies - that is - we borrowed some fresh food from Mrs. Wilson's garden - fresh peapods, and carrots, and wonderfully ripe raspberries...all we could carry in our caps. And we hid ourselves under a tipped over trailer behind a neighbors garage. And we settled in for a wonderful time hidden away.

Long after lunch time we heard our mothers calling for us. And calling for us. I even heard my mother's this is your last chance whistle - come or your goose is cooked. But we were content - feeling special.

We even heard some sirens a little later. But we still had food to eat and marbles to play with. And then - the food was gone - and the searching seemed to have stopped - and the afternoon chilled under the trailer's shade. And we were ready to be found... and no one was looking. But we were looking to be found. And we crawled out of hiding and headed home - a bit hesitantly.

And I will never forget two things. My mother's relief and hug of welcome, and my father's wordless whack of warning that such wandering wasn't wise. But the hug trumped the whack.

Because... the hug was hanging the sign, the welcoming sign, that grace always hangs out for us to see. Welcome! I sought the lord. He answered me. He came to his senses and went home, and his father welcomed him. In Christ we are a new creation.

Grace sees beyond and gets beyond the pains of our goofed up, maybe even really screwed up lives. Grace, is, I suppose, a bit like gravity. We can run off in our own directions. We can speed off after life's possibilities at our own frantic pace. We can try to orbit around the moon of our illusions of self grandeur.

But in the end we need to come to terms with who we are and whose we are. We need to let the truth be known to ourselves. That we are not masters of our own fate, but still and always children of the living God.

I know its one of the learnings I realize every time I'm on a mission trip - some where not so wired with the wild and invasive and wicked pace of our life style. I learn then, again, that you cannot fill the unforgiving minute with any more than 60 seconds of worth of life. But you can, we can, try to cram so much into every 60 seconds that we can lose the wonder and even the beauty of the pace of life God has given us.

The futurists tell us life is moving faster and faster now? Really. Has a second been stretched? Has a minute or an hour or a day grown longer? Did daylight savings time add one second to the length of the year? Even my digital watch says no. But did it just invite us again to try to fill the unforgiving minute with more than 60 seconds worth of life. To squeeze out some space, God given space, intended for us to see and be more a part of the pace of life at its God given best.

And we squeeze the time and squeeze such pace out of our lives. I read some old Tidings of our Church, newsletters from the 1960's - We will not ever go back there again... for many reasons... we've moved on, and will move on. We don't drive 1960 cars anymore – or live in 1960 houses - or expect 1960 medical care.

But for all that we are richer in things, I think we may be poorer as people. We seem less connected. We spend less time with each other. We are part of fewer regular groups. We are more wired and wire less connected than ever before, and, sadly, I think, less really connected to one another.

I heard the schedules of some of our families, and I wonder at your stamina. Your children are involved in many good, but so many more activities , with more complicated time schedules and time commitments.. I wonder at your scheduling ability.

But sometimes, sometimes, I sense - just a glimpse of panic behind the pupils of your eyes...and my own children's eyes - A bit of dim doubt about where it all is leading. A touch of breathlessness, a bit of a bother at the battle to fit all the stuff into the same 60 seconds you grew up with - but that seemed, what, saner, safer, more satisfying?

How old foogyish that sounds. But is it possible it is the prodigal son who had an old foogyish idea? He came to his senses. He'd been running so fast after life, he actually had been running a way from a better life. Less alluring, less glamorous, less glitzy - more grounded in the truth of love.

Am I talking against change? For a static status quo in life? No growth, no change, no new ideas? Of course not. Life moves on. We need to grow in our understanding of all things in life. How our universe works, and how the incredible creation of our bodies and minds work. We need to find ways for more of God's people to share in more of God's bounty - fairly.

We need to find ways to take away the love of sinning that stains and destroys so many lives. We are after all - as Christians - a new creation. No longer ruled by our earthly passions, but by our profession of belief in a heavenly God whose ways are not our ways.

Yes there is a sadness when we rush so hard and fast to fill our days with stuff, to squeeze every minute so full that we miss some of the wonder of the world around us.

I often work quite late here at the Church office - when phones stop ringing and even emails stop coming. And for all that I feel the pressure to try to help this Church, your Church, meet your needs, your need for good worship, and effective teaching, and faithful pastoral care, and careful creative effective use of your gifts of time and money... and now I carry a deepened commitment to the future we as a church need to prepare for.... Building to share our faith...

For all that I feel these pressures... and they squeeze my time ... I often come out of the church into the wonder of the night.... Star filled, some nights. Moon lit at times. Clouds scudding across the sky. Lights glimmering on the lake - rain washed and sometimes snow whitened...

And then, almost by nature's plan - I am forced to come to my senses... to come to my senses. And know, know, anew, again, that most of all, most of all, I am a child of the living God. And in Christ I have been called out of the way of the world, and how fast it wants me to run.

That all I have in any minute is 60 seconds, and its all I every will have. And that maybe, maybe, these minutes and all the minutes are God's gift to me, and to you, to come to know God...more and more. That maybe that's why I am alive. To come to know God with whom I will spend the rest of my life - and God's life.

Yes change. We Christians are all about change. But we are being changed from being creatures of this crazy frantic, race for what in the world we can win... We have been changed into little Christ's - into forever children of the living God.

Who - when its all over, this life is all over - no matter how much we fill it full of stuff - even good stuff - If we've come to our senses, we know the father who is the source of our comfort and happiness, forever. And then, then, when we've been there, with God, for 10,000 years, we will have only just begun to sing God's praise, and we will know life in all its fullness.

Listen, Listen.... Amazing Grace - How firm a foundation ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your gain in God's wonderful word. What more can he say than to you

he has said, to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled. Listen - God's grace is God's gift - yours and mine for the asking - when we know we need it. Listen - Fear not, I am with thee, be not dismayed, For I am your God, and will still give thee my aid.

Steal some minutes for being still.... Read his word ... Steal more minutes and study with others... Grow into God's grace - He will strengthen you, help you, cause you to stand, held by God's hand...

Don't just hide in the hectic pace of our day, don't get lost in the in the hurried pace of living.... Come out, come out, from wherever you are.. and be found... By the God who made you and loves you, and seeks for you to be God's own now and forever. Amen.

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