

# Grace United Methodist Church 2023 Lenten Devotional



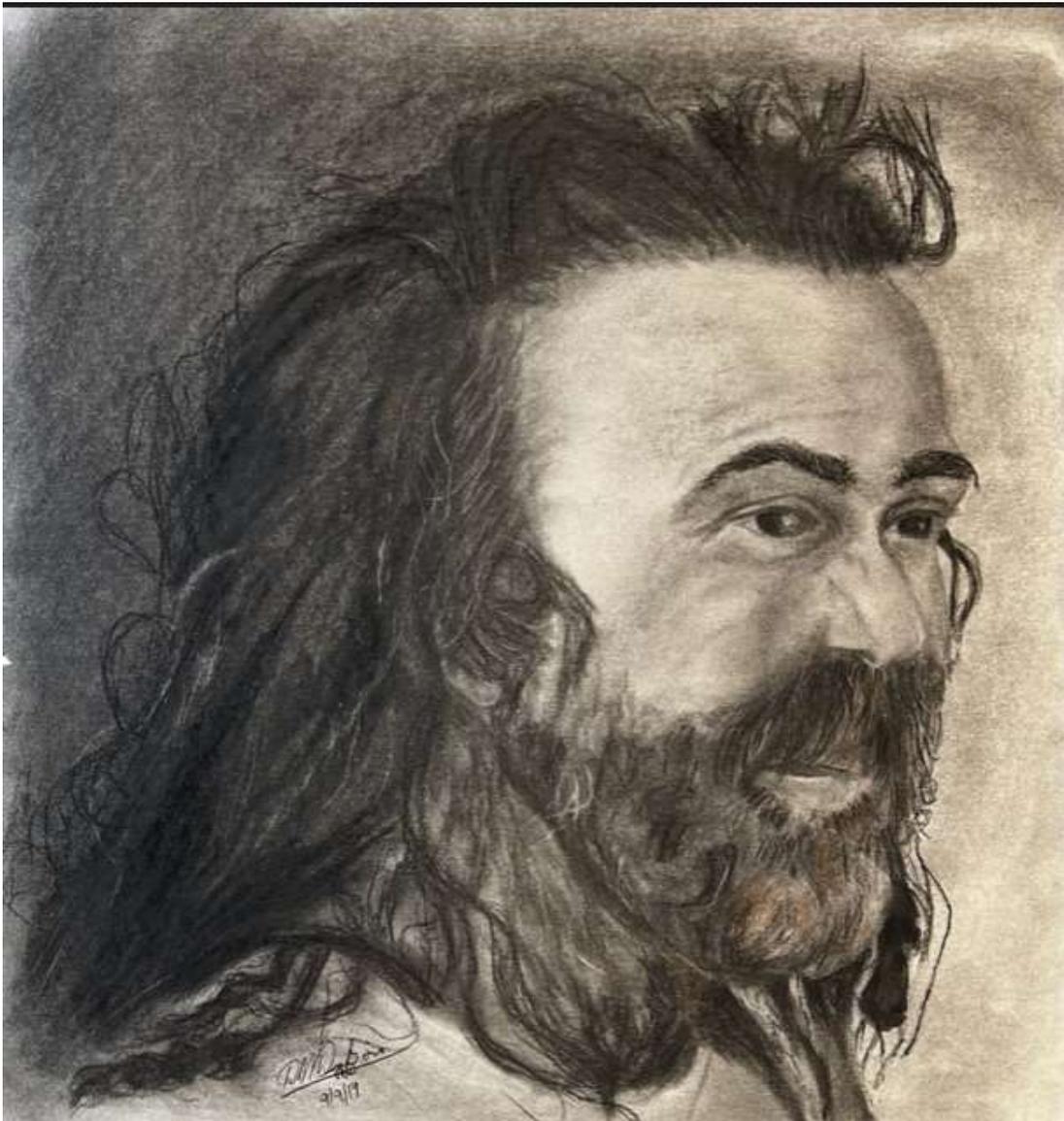
Stories of Grace



**Wednesday, February 22, 2023 – Ash Wednesday**

**Scripture:** Mathew 25:34-40

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'



“Who do you say I am?” Original charcoal and graphite on paper. 16” x 20”.

**Message:**

Several people looked over my shoulder as I sat doing this sketch. Many remarked “What a beautiful portrait of Jesus!” Things are not what they appear to be.

This is not a portrait of Jesus. The man is a forty something year old, lifelong surfer, real estate investor, lead singer in his own rock band and a nationally known — if not internationally known — tattoo artist! He had dreds down his back past his waist. His dirty surfer t-shirt and shorts revealed arms and legs filled with tats (quirky but not distasteful). If you were walking the beach with your kids, you would probably give him and his friends a wide birth. Despite his appearance, he is one of the nicest people you will ever meet; a beautiful smile and quick, head-back, fun-filled laugh.

So it is with many of the street people I meet. I talk with them; ask permission to photograph them and do a portrait. Some will not talk. Some will not show their face. I pay them, bless them and sometimes share a prayer with them. They are always grateful. Most seem to just want to be recognized and have someone to talk with and carry on a heartfelt conversation.

Why do this? I believe in Jesus’s presence in these interactions — personal, not just passing a few dollar bills. Jesus is present in them as He is in me. What I do in my interactions with them I may be doing with the Lord! The Lord works through me to raise awareness of these people to others and bring a little happiness into their lives.

**Prayer:**

Lord, help me to know the least of these in order that we both may learn that we share God’s greatest gift: His eternal love. Amen

**About the author:**

Dennis DuBois is a retired Navy Captain (Intelligence) and defense contractor. Oil painting and sketching/drawing are his passions, with showings and awards in competitions across the DMV region and works in collections in eight states. He and his wife Marla are members and have attended Grace for eight years; Marla plays in a bell choir. They are originally from Iowa. They have a daughter (Stephanie) and son (John).

**Thursday, February 23, 2023**

**Scripture:** Matthew 5: 14-16

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your creator in heaven.

**Message:**

My mom, who was also my Youth Pastor, took me on my first mission trip in the 9th grade, and I was hooked. It was the first time I realized that giving to others is actually a gift to yourself, and one that can change your life. Since then, I have been on approximately 20 mission trips. I have loved every one of them, and like so many of us, I wanted to pass this love onto my kids. This past summer, nearly 25 years later, I found myself sending my teenagers on a mission trip with Grace Church. While they were away, I prayed that they would fall in love with helping others, that God would transform their lives, open up their hearts, give them compassion to care for others and an experience that would stay with them a lifetime. When I witnessed the joy in my son's eyes and excitement in his voice as he told me about the work they had done and the friendships he had made, and when my daughter said the words, "I will never miss the summer mission trip", I knew that my prayer had been answered. Another answer to prayer is the opportunity we have to participate in a family mission trip with Grace UMC during Holy Week. What a joy it will be to serve in mission together with my children, their Yaya, who is also going on the trip, and members of my Grace church family.

There is a mission field everywhere we look; people looking for help in meeting their basic needs as well as people who need the light and love of God in their lives. We, my friends, are the hands and feet of Christ. We are the light of the world. God calls us to serve the lost, the last, and the least. The good news is that, when we follow this call, not only do we have the opportunity to positively impact the life of someone else, but our lives are transformed as well! Who is God calling you to serve this day?

**Prayer:**

Loving God, thank you for the call to serve and the opportunity to give back in and through this place called Grace. Grant us courage to step out of our comfort zones in loving our neighbors and shining your light throughout the world. Amen.

**About the author:**

Pastor Jessica is married to her best friend, Steven, and they have 6 children ranging in age from 10 to 19. Yes, it is the modern-day Brady Bunch, and they hear that a lot! The family adopted two adorable kitties in the past year, Jack & Jill. If you ask about them, Pastor Jessica will almost definitely insist on showing you a picture.

**Friday, February 24, 2023**

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 12:9–10

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

**Message:**

The world tells us to be strong and independent. But Jesus is counter cultural. He knows the truth is every human on earth is completely dependent on Him, and all our strength and good accomplishments flow from Him. He knows how weak we are, he remembers we are only dust, each man’s life but a breath. To Him goes all the credit and all the glory for all the good things ever done by anyone. Although it is in our nature to be prideful, to covet what our brethren have, to credit ourselves in our achievements and power, and to consider our bodies as our own. But the truth is we belong to a loving a Sovereign Father who bought us at a sacred price, and our freedom should not be used to indulge ourselves. Rather He made us to be humble, to serve each other, to fix our eyes on Him, to build up our treasures in Heaven not on earth, to be content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. We often consider our struggles, material lacking, and infirmities a hindrance. But like Paul we may learn that God’s power is best demonstrated in our lives in the midst of human frailties so that God alone is praised, that in knowing our dependency we do not become conceited, that we may be grateful in crucifying our sinful desires, and our hearts be renewed by the Holy Spirit through our Lord’s extraordinary, amazing grace. This grace was sufficient for Paul, and it is sufficient for us. Indeed, it is more than sufficient, for God’s grace is more than we could ever deserve or hope for. God’s grace transforms our hearts and our perspectives. When we come to the end of our power and strength, Christ remains, and oh what mighty Power He is. When we are weak, in our reliance on Christ and by his strength, He makes us spiritually strong. Life is a test and a trust, worldly troubles will endure, but so too shall grace endure and never fail us.

**Prayer:**

Almighty Father in Heaven, we love you so much. Thank you for the abundant blessings and love you shower down upon us everyday. Lord, help us to remember that you give us our lives one day at a time, and our days are numbered. May our lives glorify you today. May you use our lives today to accomplish your purposes. In your Son’s Holy name we pray, Amen

**About the author:**

Fred Mentzel is gratefully married to Molly Mentzel and they have two adult children. Fred and Molly live in Manassas and teach Sunday school and volunteer in ESL. Fred enjoys reading and taking care of his aquarium.

**Monday, February 27, 2023**

**Scripture:** Romans 11:6 (NLT)

And since it is through God's kindness, then it is not by their good works. For in that case, God's grace would not be what it really is—free and undeserved.

**Message:**

Sometimes I struggle with my name. I feel like I don't deserve it. Grace. One word, one name — carrying infinite meaning and depth — and then there's me.

I recognize my life in America as my only life, often forgetting that I was born around the world in South Korea. I departed from my Korean life before I was even one year old, being adopted into an American family.

My English name is Grace, but I was born with the Korean name Han Ah Reum. Coincidentally, Han Ah Reum is also the full name of the Asian grocery giant many of us know as "H Mart"; and it translates to "one arm full of groceries". Did my biological mother name me after a grocery store? If you ask a Korean, the translation means "one arm full of groceries" but could also mean "spreading both arms to cover".

I think about my biological mother back in Korea who surrendered me to a foster home when I was born. I think about my foster mother who spread her arms to care for and protect me until I was placed in a permanent home. I think about how I was loved and cherished even though I had no actual family to call my own.

And I think about my family today. The family who gave me the last name of Rotz. Who waited for me at the airport to bring me home for the first time. Who cheered for me at swim meets, watched me sing in countless ensembles, and stood with me in the stands of Neyland Stadium to watch the Vols while I was in college.

Sure, the coincidence attached to my name is a great conversation starter — even comical at times — but the coincidence has still managed to shape me and enable me to recognize that I'm a product of undeserved love.

Through my English name of Grace, I value the trajectory of my life as an international adoptee: living my first four months in a Korean foster home to being raised in an American family. But even as I reflect on this, I still manage to ask "why me?" How did I stumble into such a beautiful life? The truth is that I don't deserve any of it.

But God loves unconditionally. He is my biological mother who surrendered me. He is my foster mother who cared for me. He is my Rotz family. He is all of us.

God is one arm full of groceries. God spreads his arms to cover. And I'm a product of His Grace.

**Prayer:**

Thank you for your free grace, even though we're undeserving, God. Let us be grateful and aware of your love so we may demonstrate it to all. Amen.

**About the author:**

Grace Rotz has been a Manassas resident since 2016 and a member of Grace UMC since 2017. She serves on the Grace Leadership Board and makes music with the Thrive Music Team. Professionally, Grace is a technical writing manager in the fintech industry.

**Tuesday, February 28, 2023**

**Scripture:** Mark 1:12-13 (NLT) The Testing of Jesus

The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. He was out among the wild animals, and angels took care of him.

**Message:**

Lent reminds us of the forty days that Jesus spent in the wilderness, tested by the devil and waited on by angels. The idea of the wilderness is something that my wife and I have experienced recently in our own lives. Until recently, we worshipped in a local church. It had been a significant part of who we were. With the onset of the COVID pandemic closing in church worship, I took on the challenge of creating an online worship experience. We spent many hours each week recording and posting videos so the church could continue worship virtually. We sacrificed our time as a labor of love for the church and its people. When we returned to in-church worship, we continued to coordinate the worship service and live stream it every Sunday. Then our pastor became ill, so we worked harder to keep worship going. We were fortunate to have guest preachers such as Clayton Childers to share the word of God. While we were honored to serve, our worship experience became “work-ship.” When the new pastor arrived, we had time to reflect and realized that worship at the church had become a chore. We were not being spiritually fed. As the new pastor settled in, she requested that I discontinue my role in coordinating worship. We realized that we needed to end our involvement in the church. And so, we began our time in the wilderness. We were plagued with doubts. We were tempted to walk away from our Christianity. We didn’t know if we could dedicate ourselves to another church. My wife and I visited various churches. They had many things that appealed to us, but none felt quite right. We looked for pastors with strong, biblically-based messages communicating to us personally. We looked for a church with praise music since we both loved to sing praise. We looked for a church where we could grow in our spirituality after many years of being responsible for others’ growth. We looked for a church that served the local community because being the hands and feet of Jesus is what being a Christian is all about.

And then we found Grace, Grace UMC. All the things that we had been looking for were there in abundance. Walking through the doors was like leaving the wilderness. We were greeted by friendly people, eager to answer our questions and to make us feel comfortable and accepted. What a joy to finally leave the wilderness.

This Lenten season, whatever the “wilderness” you are traveling through, remember to avoid the devils, appreciate the wild beasts, and look out for the angels God puts in your path to help you. And when you are through that “wilderness,” may you also find and be filled with Grace.

**Prayer:**

Dear Lord, we know that sometimes your Spirit calls us to the wilderness. And we thank you for the angels that you send to guide us back to your Grace. Amen.

**About the author:**

David and Vanessa Jones are recent attendees at Grace. David works in IT and enjoys working with technologies and solving problems. Vanessa works as a substitute teacher for Prince William County School to work with children. They have two children, a son who lives with them and a daughter living in Utah.

**Wednesday, March 01, 2023**

**Scripture:** Romans 15:5 (CEB)

May the God of endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude toward each other, similar to Christ Jesus' attitude.

**Message:**

It was Christmas Eve at 3:15 pm. Worship was at 4:00. But being part of the choir meant showing up early. He wasn't too happy about being there. It had already been a pretty long day. There had already been lots of excitement and some presents to unwrap and play with. There had been some good food, and more to come.

But first there was rehearsal. And worship.

Fortunately, when he walked in he was greeted by a leader that said something like this: "Thank you for your hard work. This is a small thank you. Merry Christmas." It was a candy cane filled with chocolates. And it was all his. And it was the right thing at the right time. It was a bit of encouragement. It was a bit of appreciation. It was a bit of love. It was a moment of grace at Grace, at 3:15 on a difficult/wonderful day. Thanks be to God.

**Prayer:**

Thank you, o God, for those who bring grace into our lives in simple, sometimes unnoticed ways. Together, we are called to make a difference in the lives of those around us. We are grateful to be on the team of grace-sharers. Amen.

**About the author:**

Denise Childers is a lover of people, a builder of relationships, and a learner that is seeking to become more inclusive to all the people that God graciously places in her path. She is grateful to serve alongside Senior adults in our congregation and community. And she is especially grateful to worship and serve alongside many of her precious family members and friends here at Grace.

**Thursday, March 02, 2023**

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

**Message:** What's My Purpose?

Tuesday, November 02, 2021 started like any other work day, in by 0700 and I start checking e-mail to see what fires need put out. 0710 and my phone rings which is highly unusual and the phone reads DDNRO Front Office, that is strange why would Major General Shipton be calling me so early in the morning? GREAT! What did I do or maybe the question is what did I not do? Maybe she just has a question about a brief I gave the previous Friday. Good morning, this is Lt Col Bryan Morgan, "Good Morning Bryan this is General Shipton, Hi Ma'am, Bryan I am calling to congratulate you...Congratulate me for what Ma'am? You made the list...what list? The Colonel Select list, you are going to be a Colonel in the United States Air Force." "Ma'am are you kidding me? No...Congratulations! Ma'am you just complicated my life." In that moment I was the most scared I have ever been, because the next person I had to tell was my wife.

In order to make Colonel in the United States Air Force promotion boards look at and consider your record of performance, education and leadership, such as if you were a Commander of a unit or for us acquisition folks, a Material Leader. A Material Leader is someone that has been board selected to lead a Major Acquisition (such as building satellites). I had a very good record of performance; I completed all my professional military education and have a Master's Degree in Space Operations. However, I was never a boarded Commander or a Material Leader. Which normally would mean the possibility of making Colonel is basically zero. So, my boss helped me work an assignment to Wright Patterson Air Force Base, Dayton, Ohio, which would put Karin and I an hour from our parents. With this plan in place Lucas applied and was accepted to Wright State University where he was going to live at home and commute to study finance. Our oldest, Caleb attends Ohio University in Athens, Ohio which meant we would only be 2.5 hours from him instead of 6.

Now I had to tell Karin that this plan was in jeopardy, folks at work said you need to call her and I told them I could not tell her over the phone. About lunch time I was able to leave, go home and talk to her. All the way home the butterflies and thoughts were just eating at me. I never knew there could be so much joy and fear at the same time. I walked into the house and she was surprised to see me in the middle of the day and immediately said what is wrong? I made it, and she instantly knew what I was talking about...she paused and then raced over and gave me a hug and said we will figure it out. She took me out to dinner and told the wait staff who in turn told the owner who came out to congratulate us and gave us dessert.

Karin and I walked around in a daze for a few days because we were trying to come to grips with this new reality and we stated many times... "We made plans and God laughed". My promotion was effective 01 Feb 2023 and I still do not know what God's plan is for Karin and I and why he wants me to stay in the United States Air Force, I am struggling to understand the purpose. I do however know one thing and take comfort in what we learned in Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Our job as we walk with the Lord is not to know why, but to have faith that he is there with us every step of the way. I will be the best Colonel I can and know that God has a purpose for me. The purpose may be as simple as He wants the Morgan's to stay at Grace a little longer...which in our book is not a bad thing...not a bad thing at all!

**Prayer:**

Lord, guide my path to do your will and allow my faith in you provide comfort that you have a plan and a purpose for me.

**About the author:**

Colonel Bryan K. Morgan has served in the United States Air Force for the last 22 years working with space systems. He, Karin, and their four boys, Caleb, Lucas, Ethan and Josiah have been attending Grace since 2016. The boys and Bryan help with mowing in the summer. Bryan is also on the hospitality and facility teams, and Karin helps with the Angel Tree at Christmas and helps serve communion.

**Friday, March 03, 2023**

**Scriptures:**

John 16:24 - Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete.

Matthew 21:22 - If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.

James 1:6 - But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

**Message: Prayers Answered in His Way and on His Time**

The early 80's were both a happy and devastating time in my life. My second child was born in 1980 and my third child came twenty-two months later in 1982. Even though I was very tired from working a full-time job and taking care of three small children and a husband who worked shift work, life was good. I was very happy. Unfortunately, my world began to crumble when my father died unexpectedly in 1983 at the age of 58.

My father was the greatest man I have ever known. I could best describe him as a quiet giant, for he stood 6' 4 ½ " barefoot and was a man of few words. He was a hard-working farmer who was a friend to all. Deals were made with a handshake. No signed papers were needed. Although I loved my mother, my father was the glue that held our family together. I wasn't sure I could pull myself out of this state of depression.

As the months went on, I relied on my children's pediatrician for guidance and support. I also begged my husband for another child to replace my father. He was adamant that three children were enough for us to raise, and this caused tension between us.

Early 1984, my third child picked up an intestinal bug which ended up being the ROTAVIRUS. He was sicker than any of the kids had ever been. After several bad days of vomiting and diarrhea, our pediatrician said he had no choice but to admit him to the hospital. He was so dehydrated that a surgeon had to be called in to perform a cut down at his ankle so that he could receive IV fluids for three days. Thankfully, with God's help, our pediatrician was able to get him well, and we came home knowing we would have to return to his office in a few days to remove the stitches from the cut down.

I can remember getting the call from the pediatrician's wife saying I would have to take my child to the other pediatrician's office to remove the stitches because our doctor was sick. I didn't know how sick he was until several days later. He had actually suffered a stroke and had weakness on his left side and extreme slurred speech.

When I lost my dad, I had prayed with all my heart that God would perform a miracle and bring him back to me. Of course, this couldn't happen, but now I wondered if I could make a deal with God. I promised God I would be grateful for the three healthy children I had, and I would stop badgering my husband about having another child if He would just let our doctor come back to normal. I needed him so badly, and so did so many other mothers in our town.

As time passed, our wonderful doctor did not get any better. I knew that the longer a stroke victim went without any improvement, the less likely they would return to normal. He never did return to his practice, but this didn't sway me. I kept my promise. I prayed every day for his healing, I didn't mention another child to my husband, and I became happy again.

One might ask, "Where is this story going?" Well, in March 1985, we welcomed our fourth (and final) child into our family. I do not love her any more than my other three, but every time I look at her, I am reminded of God's grace. He could not bring back my father and He could not heal our pediatrician, but He didn't ignore me. God did hear my prayers, but he answered them the way He thought was best and in His own time. God is good, all the time!

**Prayer:**

Gracious God, thank you for answered prayers on your time and on your time. Amen.

**About the author:**

Mary Frances Bukva is a member at Front Royal UMC where she sings in the choir and play handbells. She is the mother of Grace's Leadership Board Chair Jonathan Bukva. Mary Frances was an educator in Warren County for 49 years before she retired in 2021. She just could not retire during the Covid school year. She spends most of her time watching cop shows like Law & Order and many others.

**Monday, March 06, 2023**

**Scripture:** Isaiah 43:1

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

**Message:**

One recent Friday, I was helping with the Community Based Instruction (CBI) at Grace. CBI provides an opportunity for high school students with special needs, paired with a volunteer, to experience a work environment. Each week there are many tasks that these young adults capably perform, and I was helping one young man with watering plants in the narthex. We were filling the water pitchers and I said to him, "My name is Linda. Tell me again, what is your name?" He replied, "my name is Angelo (not his real name)." He then paused and looked directly at me with a mixture of tremendous sadness and disbelief and softly said, "You forgot my name." Sometimes, those with special needs say out loud the things the rest of us are really thinking but keep inside.

Names are important. A name recognizes the uniqueness of the individual, and being called by name makes us feel known, respected, and valued. Calling someone by name creates a relationship that draws us closer to each other. That's part of the reason that we're encouraged to wear name tags at Grace.

God never forgets our name. He knows each of us intimately and calls us into a deeper relationship with Him. In Isaiah 43:1, the Lord says, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine." We are so fortunate to have the assurance of God's love. He has claimed us as His own by calling our names.

I could see that Angelo was really crushed that I had forgotten his name and I felt terrible. I apologized and promised him I would never forget it again. He smiled sweetly and said, "It's OK." We continued our task of watering plants, and I felt the grace that his forgiveness provided me.

I know that I may forget other names in the future, but what a blessing it is that God will never forget Angelo's name or ours.

**Prayer:**

Gracious Lord, thank you for knowing our names. Thank you for understanding us, guiding us, and drawing us closer to you. Help us to love others as you've loved us. Help us to make people feel like they are family at Grace. In Jesus's name, Amen.

**About the author:**

Linda Way and her husband Andy joined Grace UMC in 2018. She is a member of the Vision Implementation Team, Prayers and Squares, Meals Ministry, and helps the Osbourn High School kids with special needs who participate in Community-Based Instruction at Grace. Following a career in IT Management, she enjoys quilting, reading, traveling, and being with her grandkids in retirement.

**Tuesday, March 07, 2023**

**Scripture:** Philippians 4: 10:13

**Message:**

My story of grace is not a recent story but one that has been ongoing over the past 30 years. It has sustained me through hardships and blessings because God has blessed me with so many friends who stood beside me and prayed for me during my times of trouble. They also celebrated with me the times of joy when I came through to the end of the hard times. I praise God for those friends and the many blessings of God. Most people have a wreath on their door but I have a sign I found in Yoders store near Madison, Virginia. It says simply: "My worries are few because my blessings are many."

When I didn't have money to buy food during that extended hard time, I asked my friends [Frank, Linda, Fran, and Sister Virginia] to pray for an answer about whether I should sell a holding I had just inherited from my mother to buy a house. I prayed that God would give me a sign so I would have no doubt of the answer. When I stepped up on the porch, I told Fran, "This is my house." I knew instantly. When I went to settlement, I found one of the two people selling the house was a member of Grace Church and I knew him and his family as well as his father who had lived in that house before his death. Fran asked later HOW I knew that was my house. The house number had three ones and a seven (I was born in 3/43) – completion. Also, the street name was Erin Court which translate to Ireland. That nun who was praying for me? She was a first generation Irish American.

Do I believe in answered prayer? With all of my heart and soul.

**Prayer:**

Father God, you have walked with me through all of my life and I thank you for your faithfulness and blessings. May I always be as faithful to you.

**About the author:**

Lil George has been a member of Grace Church since 1980. Although she lived away for twelve years, when she came to visit her children, she also attended Grace as her home base. She could hardly wait to move back to Virginia with her friends. In her younger days, she was extremely active in the life of all of her churches. She thanks God for those experiences.

**Wednesday, March 08, 2023**

**Scripture:** Job 11: 18

You will be secure, because there is hope; you will look about you and take your rest in safety.

**Message:**

The youth council and I planned the youth kickoff over the summer, filled with fun games. After all, this fall would be the first time we would be able to have a REAL kickoff since the pandemic began. When folks began to arrive, it was apparent that things were anything but NORMAL. We did not have the number of students we had in the past but even more importantly, the students seemed really preoccupied, not ready for silly games. The youth leaders and I were perplexed and we asked "What is up gang?" Our students were candid with us and explained that they were enduring lots of stress at school. We quickly scrapped the games and sat down and listened to the youth that attended. Our students began to share all sorts of stories.

One student was upset by having different substitutes and not even having a teacher assigned to the class even though it was week 3. One student was distraught that the fights in the halls were horrible, upsetting and plentiful. Another was horrified that a student had brought a gun to school. One student was asked if they wanted gummy candy that they found out could have been laced with drugs. Lockdowns, drills, fights, drugs, vandalism, and other REAL world stressors were bothering our beloved students. They were upset and had no where to download these events since their parents were worried, and they just did not have safe places to talk about these things.

Our Adult leaders listened, prayed and connected with our students. Grace UMC was able to be their safe space.

I believe this scripture from the book of JOB is helpful to helping us all. Job was a faithful believer in God and even though he endured countless injustices he remained solid in his faith. WE too have been bombarded by numerous school shootings, and sensational headlines. It would be easy to become hopeless. But as Christians and as members of Grace UMC we are cared for and loved by a God who is alive and well and active in our community. Our pastors remind us that we find hope in JESUS. WE all hope that things will get better. WE hope in the ability for our students to come to the church able to download their issues and be heard. We offer God's loving grace to one and all who enter our doors. WE look about us and rest in the one who provides love and care beyond all that the world can offer... God is love. God's grace is sufficient and we must lean not on our own understanding but on the fact that we have hope in the resurrected Lord. God sent Jesus to show us the way. We are secure in hope. The hope that these students will be able to navigate these troubled times with Christian witnesses (adult youth leaders) that give of their time each Sunday to be there and bear witness that God loves them.

Thanks be to God for all the ways the congregation prioritizes the youth and their ability to come to Grace to learn and share, so that there is still time for games and fun and to be teens! Grace UMC gives us a space to have a foundation of God, prioritize care for one another while leaving space and time to enjoy the Grace of God.

**Prayer:**

God of compassion and safety, help us to depend on you. Our days have been filled with many sensational headlines and things that we imagine break your heart - they definitely break ours. May you continue to be our rock and foundation, our refuge and hope. As this lent asks us to turn back to you, may Grace UMC continue to be a place of refuge and love, our anchor to help us unravel our worries and be reminded of the HOPE only you can provide. Keep us safe and grounded so that our lives can be filled with joy and love. Amen

**About the author:**

Debbie Cali is the director of youth ministries and mission at Grace UMC. When Debbie is not thinking up something fun to do, she can be found walking her dog, Beignet, or being in mission around Manassas. Debbie is married to Brian, an avid road biker, and they are proud of their two grown children. Debbie Praises God for the ways Grace has been a great place to ground her family in the hope of the Lord.

**Thursday, March 09, 2023**

**Scripture:** Mark 8:23-25 (NIV)

He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

**Message:**

I have never prayed for a miracle. Not the day I found out my daughter had Cerebral Palsy and might not ever walk or talk. Nor the day she was diagnosed with intellectual disability and would always function at a 3-5 year old level. Nor when Autism, seizure disorder, OCD, and anxiety diagnoses were added to her already-long list of disabilities. I accepted these each time and then went to work getting the services, therapies, support, and schools that would improve her life as much as possible. Don't get me wrong, I believe in miracles! I am in awe when they happen.

Looking back at certain signs in my past, I feel God was preparing me for a life that would include people with disabilities. I just didn't realize it until my daughter was born. I did and still do sometimes grieve the life she will never have. Would I choose these disabilities for her? No. Would I change things if I could? I want to say no because that's what a "good" mom would say, right? Life is hard for her and for me too. But how many of us get to live life through a child's eye? She does 24/7! She's accepting of everyone. In her mind, everyone is worthy of being a friend. Imagine if we, as adults, saw each other this way. If there were more "Alys", the world would be a very different place; so no, I wouldn't change her. She's perfect just as she is!

The miracle I now pray for is that others "see" her as a funny, compassionate, loving, empathic, caring person who just wants to be accepted and included. That's happening at Grace. We spend Sunday morning visiting and greeting people who know her. She often sits with friends or other families without me, which is a blessing that gives me a short break to focus on my worship time and her some independence. She tells me "Jesus is in her heart" because of a caring Sunday School teacher. Grace is her place to be accepted. Is it perfect every time or with every person? No, but if you just take the time to talk with her and get to know her, and let a miracle happen...she'll change your life.

**Prayer:**

Dear God, I pray that we, as your children, "see" each other with unconditional love, without judgment, with empathy and compassion. This is the miracle I pray for. Amen

**About the Author:**

Beth Brooks serves as the Director of Church Operations at Grace. She keeps the building going and we all appreciate it.

**Friday, March 10, 2023**

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 12:9

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Paul prayed to God three times to have the thorn removed from his side because it tormented him. God's response, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

**Message:**

What is your weakness? What brings you to God in prayer repeatedly because you need His help?

God has seen me through a lot of health related ailments in the ones I love and even myself, and has always brought us through. He has seen me through relationships I couldn't fix, and in the end, showed me how to love and honor those who are hard to love. When I have felt alone, He has reminded me that I am a child of God, I am loved, and He has never let me go. Who doesn't smile when they read those words? You are loved by God! (Smile!)

So what do I pray about regularly these days? I desperately want to be right with God. I want everything I think, and say and do to be right with God. My favorite beatitude is, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." I routinely ask God "to order my day in the way it should go, and please let my thoughts words and deeds be right with you." I don't want to offer a thoughtless response in any situation. I do want to know the right words to say when faced with an opportunity to display God's love. I don't want to hesitate to do whatever He is calling me to do to help those in need. And I do want to silence all those worldly thoughts that seep into my brain. I realize those don't sound like big weaknesses, but they are what brings me back to God constantly, and I am grateful that God's grace is sufficient. It's there for me, and it's there for you.

**Prayer:**

Dear Lord: Please help me be right with you in thought, word and deed. Please help me reflect your love everywhere I go. Amen

**About the Author:**

Alissa Hudson has enjoyed working on the Columbarium project, is a regular attendee of the mid-week bible study and enjoys helping with coffee service on Sunday mornings.

**Monday, March 13, 2023**

**Scripture:** Psalm 104:8

The mountains rose, the valleys sank down to the place that you appointed for them.

**Message:**

This past year Sandra and I had the good fortune to be able to spend extended time with a group that included members of Grace Church, some other friends and several new friends. We had many opportunities to enjoy extended conversations, enjoy fellowship around good meals, experience new things and from my perspective participate in an extended religious experience. It was like the “second hour” on steroids.

I experienced both literally and figuratively mountain top highs and deep valley lows. It was a chance to experience Christianity in new forms of expression, through the small acts of kindness of others (both inside and outside of our group), through shared experiences that allowed us to appreciate our differences, through the compassion shown in recognizing our human limitations and seeing how small actions can make a big difference, through deep conversations about our faith and the impact it has on our lives.

What strikes me most from this experience is that I could see God’s fingerprints not only in the historical stories and places but in everything that we were doing and experiencing. While we were actually experiencing God’s glory on a mountaintop and later in a valley, the location was not as important as the people that had been brought together. God had brought this particular small group together, in ways that I could not have arranged, to witness and worship together in order to build my faith.

This is also true in my everyday life and relationships. When I am patient, I can see the amazing ways that God has chosen to make his presence known to me. When I take the time, I can see the opportunities that God has placed in my day for me to bear witness. When I come to Grace UMC, I experience the ways that God is molding me to be the person that I was created to be.

**Prayer:**

Praise the Lord, O my soul, praise the Lord.  
Let me bloom where you have planted me,  
Let me shine in your appointment,  
Let me be the glorious person that you created me to be.  
Praise the Lord, O my soul, praise the Lord.  
Amen.

**About the Author:**

Pat Pate has been a member of Grace Church with his wife Sandra, since they moved to Manassas in 2013. They have been married for 37 years and have been involved in many ministries since they met at UNC. Currently, Pat is serving in his final year on the Grace Church Board.

**Tuesday, March 14, 2023**

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:16

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

**Message:**

As a Stephen Minister commissioned in 2015, I had learned to hold back on sharing my own stories. A Stephen Minister is trained to listen to the person who has been assigned to her as a “care receiver.” Our focus is entirely on the care receiver’s story. We agree to meet each week for about an hour and to envision how the care receiver can draw on her innate wisdom and faith, which will lead her out of her darkness and into her own light.

The church where I had been commissioned had decided the Stephen Ministry would no longer be offered. I needed to find a new church with an active Stephen Ministry group. My husband Tim and I had retired in 2013 and lived in Manassas. To my delight I found Grace UMC had an active Stephen Ministry group in 2016. I joined this group and soon learned that they wanted to hear my stories of faith. I was amazed! Here were people who did not want me to just listen. They wanted to hear me!

Keep in mind that my career as a spokeswoman for major trade associations required me to be very out-front with comments and stories on behalf of the industries I represented. I was expected to speak out. I was not asked to listen except to those in the industry who were guiding me. Speaking out came naturally for me.

After retiring I also sought volunteer service that would match my interest in serving others who are bent and broken in body and mind. That is my purpose: To encourage and lift up people. I went to the Prince William Medical Center and became a volunteer who visited with patients each Thursday and also led a team that did the same. Again, I was using my listening skills and rarely told my own stories. While listening to these patients I heard amazing stories and also hope. Faith would often fill the room when I asked God to make me His instrument of peace. I prayed the St. Francis Prayer each week before I visited, and God was guiding me.

When I joined Grace UMC in 2018, I thought I was a mature Christian well versed in the Bible’s teachings, and I wanted to be around other mature Christians who could tell me their stories of faith. I heard many of these in our Stephen Ministry group and also in the Applied Life class each week. I had not anticipated that my fellow class members would want to hear my own stories. When I would ask, “May I tell you a story?” someone would enthusiastically say, “Yes!” They still do, and they have heard many of my stories, even those that are fairly terrifying. I am not afraid to tell my truth.

Thank you, Grace UMC, for your love and support to me so that I can feel good about shining the light found in my own stories. You have given me a voice.

**Prayer:**

Dear Lord, may all who have stories of faith to tell come forward and share Your Light through their stories.

**About the Author:**

Edie Clark and her husband Tim Smyser moved to the Manassas area in 2013 after retiring. They enjoy road trips and live music together. They hope to move to The Villages in Florida in 2023 to fulfill a 40-year dream of living in a tropical place with others who also have had vibrant lives.

**Wednesday, March 15, 2023**

**Scripture:** Psalm 95:1-3

O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

**Message:**

There are many things I love about Grace United Methodist Church. Worshiping at Grace, however, is the one thing that is closest to my heart. Since returning to in-person worship after the pandemic, I have realized how vital worship is to my life.

On most Sundays, I start my day off by listening to the 9:00 service online while I am getting ready to go to the 11:00 service. The music provided by the Thrive Team is always uplifting and I find myself singing along at home. Listening to the sermon before hearing it in person helps me to prepare my thoughts to hear the words that will be spoken as I sit in the sanctuary at the 11:00 service.

Some Sunday mornings I feel joyful but there are other mornings when I am dealing with something heavy and difficult. Even on those difficult mornings I become engaged in worship and I value each part of the worship service. I can feel the light of God's presence and His peace as the voices in the sanctuary lift messages of praise and thanksgiving to God. Time and again God will reveal himself to me as I sing the words of the hymns, read aloud the opening prayer, recite the Apostles Creed, and listen to the amazing music provided by all our talented choirs. Often, I feel like God is speaking directly to me through the words of the sermon. In the message of every sermon, I can discover some application to my life.

As Christians, the desire to worship God is just part of who we are. We worship God because of who He is and what He has done. Being a part of worship at Grace Church has deepened my desire to draw even closer to God and to know him better. There is no other place I would rather be worshipping God than in the sanctuary at Grace UMC.

**Prayer:**

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for creating in us the desire to worship you. Thank you for a place like Grace where we can sing praises to your holy name and give thanks for all that you have done for us. We give thanks that we can worship you with full hearts and with broken hearts with the confidence that you know us, and you love us. In your precious name we pray, dear Lord. Amen.

**About the Author:**

Carol Stoneback and her husband Wayne have been members of Grace since 1992. Carol is a retired special education teacher. Carol served as Stephen Minister at Grace for many years. Currently, she is a member of the Vision Team working with Ministry Architects.

**Thursday, March 16, 2023**

**Scripture:** Ephesians 3:20 (NIV)

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.

**Message:**

I long for a world where every voice is heard and welcome at the table; where each person regardless of age, race, gender, sexuality, or disability is seen as valuable to the community and not just cared for, but empowered with agency. I often link that dream to this verse. I first was drawn to it at a church I attended in NY. When I was looking for new churches I often took hearing this verse as a sign I had found a “right fit” But sometime toward the end of 2018, I began to feel that the non-denominational church I had been attending was not the fit I was looking for.

Meanwhile, I was watching what was happening in the United Methodist Church and felt called to return to my roots, but didn’t feel right going back to Centreville either. I wanted to do more here in MY Community-Manassas. I visited local churches, consulted with others within the UMC and found my way to Grace. For a year I attended quietly. Always welcomed, but never fully immersing myself in the community. I recently reread my Christmas Eve post from 2019 in which I shared my experience attending services by myself and not knowing anyone. Wow, how much things can change in 3 years.

During the pandemic, I found the community I was seeking even when distanced, we were together in Grace. From weekly sermons to the Anti-Racist book study to the Advent Box, I saw a church that was working actively toward that inclusive vision I imagined. Somehow in the midst of what had been the most disconnected time, I was called to get more involved in Grace. I reached out to pastors with questions, volunteered with the return to church crew, helped make VBS boxes, added a square to the quilt, then became a member, joined the leadership board, started teaching Sunday School and most recently preached on Laity Sunday. God was at work through all of that.

I see God moving in our congregation each Sunday building an authentic inclusive community. One specific area I see this is in the Accessibility and Inclusion ministry and Children’s Ministry. Though the Accessibility and Inclusion ministry is just getting started, I already see connections growing between participants, both giving and receiving of support. Our children’s ministry is booming and I see students making connections to each other and God’s word both in Sunday school and in the worship services.

God is at work doing more than I can ask or imagine at Grace. I was looking for a connection to my community and the United Methodist Church, and what I got was so much more. Through Grace ministry, I feel a deeper connection to the work that is being done in my community. Every Sunday, I see a small glimpse of the work God is doing through the ministry and I can not wait to see what is next.

**Prayer:**

Dear Heavenly Father, may you continue to move in ways that are more than we can ask or imagine through your power. May you continue to use the ministry of Grace to build community where all are welcome, supported, and grow. May Your will be done here as it is in heaven. Amen

**About the Author:**

Gretchen Ward grew up less than a mile from Grace UMC in the house where she is currently living. She is an occupational therapist and devoted advocate for all marginalized people, but particularly people with disabilities. She serves on the Grace UMC leadership board, teaches 4th & 5th grade Sunday school, and wears orange and blue on college game days—Let’s Go Hoos!

**Friday, March 17, 2023**

**Scripture:** Psalms 34:4

I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.

**Message:**

On a Friday that started hectic, and went downhill from there, I found myself grappling with how to deal with my emotions of the day. Although I had come home, my workday over, I continued to replay the frustration and anger that others had bestowed upon me earlier. One person in particular, a woman so angry with the situation she found herself in, had lashed out at me. I was simply doing my job. Sometimes life is not fair.

I drove home, trying to figure out how to focus on the good that is the weekend, instead of reliving the day. Too many previous weekends had been consumed with dread surrounding work and I didn't want another repeat. I wanted to focus on the good that is my home... my husband, kids, and dog. They needed me and in that moment, I desperately needed them. I was trying to consciously choose to not focus on the anger. "How do I get past this?" I thought. I wasn't sure how. I decided to talk to God. I wasn't sure what to talk about or ask Him for. Understanding? I knew that wasn't going to happen, at least not tonight. To know that I had done the right thing? No, I already knew that my actions had been correct. For the woman to understand my point of view? Now I knew I was asking too much. So, I simply asked Him to help me "turn it off" for a few days. Work would still be there on Monday.

My daughter had a friend over for a sleepover. We decided to watch a movie and we asked our young guest what she would like to watch. Flipping through Netflix she chose a newer movie, 'The Christmas Chronicles'. "But Christmas is over, it's January," I said out loud. She said it was one of her favorites and since our family hadn't seen it, it seemed a logical choice. It wasn't a classic like 'Miracle on 34th Street' or "It's a Wonderful Life'. It didn't make us laugh like 'The Grinch' or 'Elf'. But it had a sweet and poignant plot... Christmas was in trouble, and Santa needed help. It dealt with the main character's woes and included the often-present plot of the main character re-realizing that Santa is indeed real. And that's when it hit me. My tears flowed freely. I believed again. I believed in the magic that is Saint Nick, I believed in God, I believed that Grace UMC would give another Sunday message I needed to hear. I was reminded that what makes Christmas so special is believing, knowing that Jesus was born so we can live an eternal life. And as I sat there and cried, I knew it was going to be okay. At least for the weekend.

**Prayer:**

Father God, thank you for reminding us of the most important things in life...our family, our friends, our faith and most importantly you! In your son's name, Jesus Christ. Amen.

**About the Author:**

Holly Anderson is busy! She is a full time Registered Nurse working currently as a School Nurse, mom to Catalina and Stella, wife to Mike, and helps take care of doggo Roxy and a plethora of bunnies. She loves volunteering her time creatively for Grace UMC and Rainbow Girls.

**Monday, March 20, 2023**

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

**Message:**

All the stories that I have about Grace's Grace could fill an entire Encyclopedia! To try and find a particular soul touching moment is an incredible undertaking! The blessings and love I have received from this church is what makes up a good portion of my being! And I am eternally grateful for being a member of our family. But as I was thinking about this task, someone popped into my mind and I just had to write of her impact on me. There have been a lot of angels from Grace - Ginny Heyward of course is my model of a what a good person is - how a person should be! But there is another lady - Lisa Bennett! She has an incredible strength and never gets the credit she deserves as an integral part of my introduction to Grace! She has since moved to NC, but still loves me enough to send me devotions, emails and cards. In the beginning, she took me up in her arms and never let go. Cold weather gear and safety vests for my biking days. She took Kelly to the store and helped her shop when I was hit by a car. She helped us move. She gave us love. And, even though she has moved, her love and Grace are in my heart! She lifts me up just thinking about her. To me she is a pure representation of Grace! Unquestioning, all fulfilling love and acceptance! Because of Lisa's persistence, I never gave up on myself and I have come a long way on my spiritual, emotional and professional journey! This is the beauty of our Grace! Without knowing it, people step into our lives and give us what we need! God has brought all of us to Grace for one reason or another! But the end result is that we touch people and are touched by people - and we thrive in His Grace at our Grace because of it!

**Prayer:**

Dear God, Thank you for this beautiful day! Thank you for connecting us all together, so that no one has to stand alone! Lord help us to love and heal others - help us to live as one with each other just as Jesus is one with you! Lord thank you for your infinite love for all people and all things. Please give us your understanding of others. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen

**About the Author:**

Barbara Barrick is blessed to have a great job, a nice house, a good car and a wife who loves her! And it hurts her when she thinks of people who don't have the things she has. So Barbara tries her best to reach out to others through Grace and our Local Transition Ministry. All this leaves her very little time to do anything else, but if she does have time, she likes to dream of playing golf, tennis and writing a book!

**Tuesday, March 21, 2023**

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

**Message:**

At the end of January 2022, I found myself drafting an email to Pastor Drew, then redrafting, then closing my computer because the vulnerability of my email felt too big, and then finally I hit the send button. I believe I even confessed that I was channeling my inner Brene Brown by reaching out. My email was to start a dialogue about a support group for mental and physical healthcare providers. We'd recently had another surge of COVID, and I was knee-deep in pandemic fatigue trying to navigate the waves that the pandemic continued to have on the mental health needs of our community. I was exhausted physically and emotionally as depression, grief, and trauma continued to climb in the community. I needed someone to talk to, knew I couldn't be alone, and then the spirit nudged me to do something about it. Pastor Drew, Pastor Jessica, Kristin Matthews, and other amazing folks at Grace quickly got on board with their support and in just over 1 month the Medical & Mental Healthcare Providers Support Group was off the ground.

When I was thinking about stories of Grace, so many came to mind in an instant. For the purpose of this story, I knew I needed to share about this support group. It has been a place of community, support, and compassion in a way that I didn't know was possible but very much hoped it could be. We share stories every time we meet, and those stories feel like shared experiences because of the bonds we've built. It's been a safe space to be, to talk about the joyful and the painful things to which we bear witness, and to be heard. Although I cannot share specific stories, I suppose this is the story of how an idea drawn from a need was heard and brought to life with the kind help of a gracious church community and the Holy Spirit. In Pastor Drew's response to my email he said, "It makes me think that the Holy Spirit may be behind it." He's 100% correct.

**Prayer:**

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for being with me always and for giving me a loving nudge to embrace vulnerability when called even when it feels uncertain. Thank you for the gift of being able to bear witness to others' stories. Please continue to guide me and give me strength as I navigate the work you call me to do. In your name I pray, Amen.

**About the Author:**

Olivia Sweetnam has been a member of Grace since 2017 and volunteers as a Sunday School teacher for Grace's adorable preschoolers. Olivia works as a mental health therapist in the local community. Olivia is wife to Dale and mother to 3 lovely humans (Abbey-19, Kamden-15, and Jordan-11). Olivia also considers herself mother to 2 rescue dogs.

**Wednesday, March 22, 2023**

**Scripture:** Hebrews 10:24–25

Let us think about each other and help each other to show love and do good deeds. You should not stay away from the church meetings, as some are doing, but you should meet together and encourage each other. Do this even more as you see the day coming.

**Message:**

Our son recently graduated from college and moved to a new city and state where he doesn't know anyone. It's an exciting time as he is able to stretch his wings and fly. He has his own apartment, his own schedule, and his own money, but he's also lonely. As his mom, I tend to internalize some of that loneliness, especially as he is now 8 hours away. I can't help but wonder who will be there for him if something happens. I've heard Pastor Drew ask this before, and I'll admit that I'm asking the same question—who will bring the casserole when he's sick?

While we Methodists are both famous and teased for our “covered dishes,” it's not really about the food. It's the community. It's the connection of fellowship that blossoms into friendship and then grows into love and support for one another.

During my years at Grace, I've participated in adult Sunday school classes, women's circles, and short-term studies. I've also been blessed to serve on a couple of vision teams, the building committee, and a number of financial work groups. There is something uniquely special about sitting in a weekly Bible study or serving on a church work team month after month with the same group of people. When you study God's Word, or try to discern God's will, or live out God's plans alongside other believers week after week, you form bonds with them that are different and deeper than the connections you make elsewhere in the world.

The connections do take some time and effort, though. After all, we “should not stay away from the church meetings” and should continue to “meet together.” When we engage and connect with others at Grace, we feel a sense of belonging. I have no doubt that if/when something happens to us, someone from Grace will be at our door with a casserole, or a letter filled with love and encouragement will arrive in my mailbox. People will—and do!—pray for us. I know this because it has already happened. We have a community that supports, encourages, and carries us through every challenge and blessing.

This is I want for my son in his new stage and place in life. In fact, this is what I want for all people—to have a community behind them, ready to pray, encourage, or bring a casserole as needed. Imagine how different our world would be if this were the case!

**Prayer:**

God our Provider and Sustainer, we thank you for the people in our lives who listen to us, pray for us, and lift us up in both good and hard times. We might forget what it's like to feel alone, so remind us to think of and care for others who may be struggling. Or perhaps we are the ones who feel lonely; if so, give us the courage to try something new and make a connection. You are always with us, Lord, help us to feel your love, comfort, and peace. Amen.

**About the Author:**

Sandy Risko recently celebrated twenty years as an employee of Grace UMC and loves being a part of this vibrant faith community. She is delighted to have recently discovered another amazing community of friends in the TBD (Thoughtful Biblical Discussions) small group that meets each Sunday morning at 10.

**Thursday, March 23, 2023**

**Scripture:** 1 John 4:19

We love because (God) first loved us.

**Message:**

I have a friend who is a song writer. He has a Spirit driven personality that makes you want to sing with both your mouth and your heart. Last Sunday, our Grace Chancel Choir sang "Show Us How to Love" in worship. This is one of Mark's songs! The lyrics are very simple and mainly consist of the title phrase "show us how to love" being repeated over and over. You know how songs can sometimes get stuck in your head; this anthem has been stuck in my head all week long. Many times I have found myself singing or humming or whistling this "Show us how to Love" as I have gone through my daily activities. "Show us how to love, show us how to love, show us, show us how to love." Where have I seen God recently? I have seen God in Mark Miller's "Show Us How to Love." But love is easier sung than done.

My friend, Mark, is gay. I think, if he were to visit Grace United Methodist Church, he would be welcomed, just as many other gay people have been welcomed at Grace, but this is not true in all churches. Many LGBTQ+ people know what it is like to come to visit a church and to be viewed with suspicion, even scorn. Even if no words are spoken, they can feel it in people's stares. They can sense the judgment and rejection. My friend knows first-hand what this feels like. Perhaps this song, "Show Us How to Love" has grown from that experience, the experience of being seen, not as a human being wondrously made in the image of God, but as someone to be a categorized, judged, and set aside. Perhaps, this song was written as a prayer for the church, a prayer for churches everywhere, struggling to love.

Without the transforming love of God working in our hearts we just cannot be God's loving people in the world. Love is a miraculous, God given, gift. Without the gift of divine transformation, we inevitably fall back into our prejudices and biases, judgments, and blindness. Only God can heal us. Only God can enable us to see others the way God sees each one of us. Like a loving parent, God knows us through and through and loves us still. This is the love that comes first, before we know to ask or think, God's love is there. Waiting. Welcoming. Making us whole. And enabling us to show love to others. "We love, because God first loved us."

**Prayer:**

Holy One, God of life and light, your love is a mystery to us. We have so much to learn and every day we fall short. Yet, even in all our imperfection, you love us, just as we are, you love us. Give us eyes to see, O God, eyes to see as you see, and hearts to love as you love, so your love may grow in us and flow through us, reflecting to others the grace and love you give us anew each day. Help us, O God; you know we can not do it on our own. "Show us how to love, O God, show us how to love, show us, show us, how to love."

**About the Author:**

Clayton Childers is a retired United Methodist clergy who stays busy by teaching Sunday School, singing in the choir, hanging out with Denise, and playing with grandchildren.

**Friday, March 24, 2023**

**Scriptures:**

Psalms 104:31-33 - I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

Micah 6:8 - He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

**Message:**

United Methodists are a singing people. Music has always been an important part of worship in the United Methodist church and in my family. I was blessed to join Grace's Treble Choir and to have Lynn Yost as my director! She understood we were not professional singers but helped us grow as singers and think more deeply about what we were singing. As Treble Singers we are worship leaders trying to help the congregation find God's grace in the music and lyrics, but we are also a sisterhood of singers who support each other in good times and bad. The pandemic, however, disrupted our fellowship and stopped us from singing (it is technologically impossible to sing together on Zoom). Lynn, however, found a way for us to grow spiritually by leading a study of spirituals using Eileen Guenther's *In their Own Words: Slave Life and the Power of Spirituals*. Over several months we came to understand that spirituals were more than biblical stories set to music, they were expressions of sorrow, resistance, and hope by a people who faced unbearable treatment under slavery. There are hidden messages in spirituals that enslaved people used to communicate hope, warn of danger and to assist escaping slaves. Satan was not the devil, but referred to people who beat or mistreated a slave, Jesus could be the Christ or anyone who helped an enslaved person, and Hell often meant being sold through the Domestic Slave Trade. One of my favorite spirituals, *Wade in the Water*, certainly celebrates baptism, but also speaks to those people who "trouble the water" to aid enslaved people escape or fought for the end slavery. After this book study, I don't sing spirituals in the same way. I know they are living witnesses to the faith, strength, and courage of millions of enslaved people. They remind us that we need to continue to fight, to "trouble the water", to help bring God's Kingdom on earth by fighting for social justice. Bill Olson, is an example of a man who is never afraid to "trouble the water." Many questioned his desire to restore and interpret the slave cabin on the grounds of the church, perhaps wanting to ignore or hide the past. Bill, however, understood the importance of recognizing the humanity of the people who lived under slavery and celebrating the work that northern Methodists did to end slavery. That restored building reminds us that part of being a United Methodist is fighting for social justice. The United Methodist General Board of Church and Society, situated across from the Capitol and Supreme Court, is full of "water troublers" who fight every day to make our world a more just and equitable place (<https://www.umcjustice.org/>).

Thank you, Lynn, for introducing me to beautiful music, offering spiritual fellowship, and allowing me to understand how God speaks through spirituals. Spirituals remind us that the church is not bringing in God's Kingdom if we ignore the pain, intolerance, and injustice of the world. The church needs to trouble the water.

**Prayer:**

Lord, as we wade into the water, move us to trouble the waters to bring about your Kingdom. When we want to escape the pain or ignore the ugliness of this world, help us remember that you charge us to trouble the waters, demand that we do justice, require us to share kindness and ask us to walk humbly with you. When we do your work, we feel your spirit right down into our heart and we must sing your praises as long as we live! Amen and Amen!

**About the Author:**

Alicia Tucker is an Associate Professor of History at Northern Virginia Community College, Manassas Campus. She is currently writing her dissertation, "A Small, but Well Chosen Library:" Rural Reading Communities and Gendered Consumption Patterns in Virginia Planter Society during the Early Republic" at GMU. Like Anne Hutchinson, who followed her favorite minister, John Cotton, to the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Alicia followed her favorite minister, Rudy Tucker, to Grace UMC where she and her family were embraced by a loving and supporting congregation of water troublers.

**Monday, March 27, 2023**

**Scripture:** Philippians 4: 4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

**Message:**

The year before I joined Grace, I lost my Poppy (my grandfather), one of my favorite people in the world. I had also just quit my job of 21 years to stay home with my son during Covid related school changes. A year later my daughter (and my best friend) left for college. A few days after, my dad passed away from cardiac arrest. I was feeling pretty sad and still adjusting to all the changes when I found Grace.

I started watching services online after Drew led my father's funeral. I joined a book study shortly after because I love reading. When it was over I joined bible study. I was actually pretty scared to join. I didn't think I was good enough at first. I'm not sure why I thought bible study was for people more experienced with reading it, but I quickly learned it is for all. Everyone is super nice and I so appreciate the questions and insights of my peers. I love that it helps me understand the scripture better than reading alone. One week we were to bring in our favorite verse and Carol and I brought in the same book and chapter, just a couple of verses apart. It was a cool moment. Another time, right before the holidays, Bill shouted out something like, "Goodnight, I love you!" to all of us. I choked up because I hadn't realized how much I missed my family saying I love you at the end of a call or family zoom.

Although I had recently lost family, I realized God gave me, through Grace, new family members to care for and care for me. To pray for and with me. To grow together, through worship, education, and service.

**Prayer:**

Dear Lord, Thank you for all the blessings in this life, seen and unseen. Please help us to recognize that you are right there with us through good and sad times, and to trust in you and your timing. Please help us to be instruments of your love and grace to our neighbors with all our hearts.  
Amen

**About the Author:**

Amanda Rambo has been a member of Grace since November 2021. She enjoys Wednesday night Bible Study and Sunday morning Mission Projects with her son, Nico. In her spare time, she loves a good book, time with her family and doggies, baking, crafting, or singing along to Broadway songs terribly.

**Tuesday, March 28, 2023**

**Scripture:** Hebrews 13:8

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

**Message:**

He is always what we need - at the right time, at the right place - He always has our backs! I am not a hugely religious person. I still have trouble giving "it" over to Christ! I do not possess that blind faith though, honestly, I wish I did. I wish I could feel that joy that I see others reveling in. Some of that is my fault. When I come to Grace. When I feel the love of my Grace family - that love swells inside of me and I know there is a God and that he is surrounding me through Grace's love. But I struggle with my own blindness, both physical and mental - and stay at home. Every now and then I try to confront my own social anxiety, but because I do not have enough faith in His purpose for me, I usually end up falling back into my routine. If I would only embrace Grace's love, I would feel so much better - but the pull of my own stigma hides me away. But I KNOW Grace is here for me and I KNOW I am loved by all of you - it is just a matter of embracing that love Grace gives to everyone so unconditionally! That's the ultimate beauty of our Grace - your love, your smiles, your presence in our lives! Knowing that Grace is in my corner lets me "Continue" my life - Maya Angelou wrote a really cool poem that I absolutely love! Anyone who struggles the way I do might find some comfort in it - maybe enough to step into the light that is Grace! "My wish for you is that you continue..."

**Prayer:**

Dear Lord, please let us Continue our battles under your care. Lord please give us strength and hope and Grace - that we may see the joys and opportunities you put in front of us. And please never leave us alone in our dark places - always show us that others love us and care that we are. Amen.

**About the Author:**

Kelly Barrick is a stay at home wife and fur-mommy! Her wife, Barbara and their baby Violet are her world! Barbara and Kelly are still working on their "new" home - making it theirs. Kelly is an avid crafter and enjoys her time of creativity in their craft room! Her dream is to go to a craft show and introduce her creativity to others! Her struggle with depression and anxiety and blindness is real - but she works hard every day to find moments of Joy.

**Wednesday, March 29, 2023**

**Scripture:** 1 John 3:17

But whoever has worldly goods and sees his brother or sister in need, and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God remain in him?

**Message:**

My youngest son is kind in a way I've never truly been. He shows kindness during moments when the rest of the world seems loud and overwhelming. He cuts through the noise, and sees opportunities for kindness and grace. When we're stuck in traffic, working late, folding five loads of laundry that have been sitting there for a week, Jordan actively finds the peace, and looks for sweet ways to bring us back to center. Jordan has been a part of Grace United Methodist Church since he was a toddler, and the impression the church has made on him is clearly reflected in the way he sees life and community.

Often when we're driving through Manassas or Gainesville, my mind is elsewhere. My eyes are on the road, but my mind is miles away. Jordan, on the other hand, watches people. He watches the people asking for money on the side of the road. He wonders whether they're warm enough or if they're able to find happiness when everything seems lost.

Jordan, without knowing it, actively seeks to offer grace to people deep in their personal struggles. What we have to give is not often much, but if Jordan wasn't actively watching for these moments of giving, these moments of grace, I'm sure I would miss the opportunity.

Jordan naturally knows that it's not our place to judge the decisions or actions that lead people to lives of struggle. Jordan knows it's unfair to keep our money because we don't know what they're going to do with what we give them. Jordan simply spots a chance to offer grace to someone who could use some.

I never use cash, but I always have cash in my wallet. It's not for us, it's for moments when Jordan sees an opportunity for grace.

**Prayer:**

Thank you Lord for loving us and all of our imperfections. Thank you for everything you've given us, and please be with those who are alone and struggling. Amen.

**About the Author:**

Dale Sweetnam and his wife Olivia have been members of Grace Church since 2017. Dale was a Public Affairs Specialist in the U.S. Army from 2004 to 2013. He now works as a Communications Manager in the U.S. Energy Information Administration within the U.S. Department of Energy. Dale and his wife love spending time with their three children (Abbey, Kamden, and Jordan), and cuddling their two dogs.

**Thursday, March 30, 2023**

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 12:26

If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

**Message:**

What I love the most about our church is the many generations of people who come together each week. I value the age-old saying "it takes a village to raise a child" and find my church family to be that village! When my son got sick at the end of 5th grade last year, he had to miss the last few days of his time at the elementary school, including a few awards ceremonies for some great accomplishments he made over the 4 years at that school. It was frustrating and sad for him, and for me as his mother. Imagine the joy and comfort we felt, when we opened our front door one of those afternoons and a bag of goodies was left on our porch from Arleen and Debbie (the Children's Ministry and Youth Ministry Directors at that time)! They knew our disappointment and sadness, and showed up in a time that was so meaningful to my family. This is a story of Grace that I will always cherish.

**Prayer:**

Dear God, thank you for this church, and all of the people who are part of it. Continue to provide us with the ears to listen and the motivation to show up for one another.  
Amen.

**About the Author:**

Kristin Matthews' role as Grace's Communications Coordinator expanded this year to include Congregational Engagement Coordination. She is excited for this opportunity to serve in new ways! She loves being part of this church with her family by her side, which includes her husband Ned, and children Connor (12), Sophia (9) and Grace (6).

**Friday, March 31, 2023**

**Scripture:** John 20:11-15

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

**Message:**

One of the greatest impacts of Grace UMC has been teaching me how to find Jesus in unexpected places, and to be open to feeling his presence in daily life. In the three years that I've been a part of Grace, so many people have shared their experiences and insight in finding the peace and assurance that Jesus offers us, even as we go about our ordinary lives. I've learned a great deal about opening the heart and mind to see the Holy Spirit at work in ways I would not have seen before.

In December, after my neighborhood's trash collection contractor suddenly went bankrupt, I took my trash to the county dump to get rid of it. The dump is a place people go through and get out of as quickly as possible. It's smelly, noisy, and full of grimy front-loaders and compactors. Over at the recycling area, I said hello to a worker and we began chatting. The man talked about the daily stories on the news about increasing cases of COVID and flu filling up hospitals, and about rising inflation emptying wallets. He looked like the weight of the world was on his shoulders as he spoke of his worries, and I had those same worries. I didn't know what to say other than, "I guess we'll just have to keep praying."

The man's whole countenance changed, and he answered me with a wide grin saying, "Yes, ma'am, that's what we have to do. We're gonna trust in Jesus! He is gonna bring us through. We will walk through that valley with Jesus and not be afraid!" He went on like that for several minutes, while I nodded and said enthusiastic amens. It was like we were having our own little revival meeting next to the recycling compactor. My spirit lifted along with his, and I was so grateful. I have thought of that man every day since, and how we both encountered the hope and assurance that is Jesus while standing in the middle of the county dump.

Even there, Jesus was at work, teaching me through this man. Before I came to Grace, this would have simply been an interesting experience. I learned at Grace to open my heart to feeling the hope of Jesus in unexpected places.

**Prayer:**

Gracious God, thank you for the gift of using your people to remind us of your steadfast love and mercy. Just as poor shepherds found hope lying in a humble stable, and grief-stricken Mary found the promise of everlasting life fulfilled at a tomb, help us to find the hope and peace of your presence when we least expect it. Amen.

**About the Author:**

Lynn Behnke is a lifelong resident of the DC metro area and lives in Centreville with her adult son. She enjoys books, Bible study, crafts, British TV, and is looking forward to working with the ESL volunteer team this spring.

**Monday, April 03, 2023**

**Scripture:** Mark 10: 13-16

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

**Message:** A Tale of Two Reagans

If you ever want to see the heart of Christ on any given Sunday, spend five minutes in the KidZone. There you will see grace in abundance. From volunteer leaders taking a sincere interest in the exciting lives of our youngest students, to the older kids swapping jokes and helping each other decode the puzzles on their welcome worksheets. All of their differences disappear, and as they listen to Bible stories and joyfully sing their favorite songs, you can truly understand what Jesus meant when he said that the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like children.

While each and every one of these kids has demonstrated some level of grace at some point, I want to talk about one in particular. Reagan is a third grader with a servant's heart and a capacity to love her neighbor that is well beyond her years. Every Sunday she walks into the KidZone, greets every single person in the room, and immediately sets to work organizing the name tags. Once those are finished, she looks for ways to help. She welcomes new students, finds additional markers, sets out extra chairs, and asks her friends about their week.

When Pop-Out Church began, Reagan was among the many students who joined us for service. There was also a new student who joined us that day, a preschooler who was also named Reagan. Little Reagan was very nervous. She was worried about being separated from her parents and going to a part of the building that was new. She sat extremely close to me, and asked a lot of questions. As we introduced ourselves around the circle, Big Reagan made the connections about their names and made it her mission to make sure her namesake felt welcome and comfortable. The following week, Big Reagan beelined for Little Reagan when the children were called forward for their special moment, holding her hand as they were escorted to the KidZone and sitting next to her during the lesson.

All of this was done without being asked. A third grader saw someone who needed grace and left her friends to give it without a second thought. This is what God loves to see in His church. Members seeing the needs of others and standing by their side ready to offer comfort and show love whether they know them or not. May we all have a heart like Big Reagan, using our gifts to be the little light that shines.

**Prayer:**

Gracious God, give us the heart of a child that we may show Your love to all we encounter. Thank you for giving us a community of faith that we may serve others and be served in times of need. Amen.

**About the Author:**

Anna Burrell is the Director of Children and Family Ministries at Grace UMC. Originally from Georgia, the Army brought her and her family to Northern Virginia in 2021. She and her husband David have two daughters, Daisy and Abigail, and they feel so blessed to have such a welcoming church family here at Grace.

**Tuesday, April 04, 2023**

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 5:11

So speak encouraging words to one another. Build up hope so you'll all be together in this, no one left out, no one left behind. I know you're already doing this; just keep on doing it.

**Message:**

It was a hot and humid August day when I returned from a long trip and stopped by the Grace Community Garden. Expecting flowers and tomatoes, I was assaulted by WEEDS – everywhere and up to my knees. How disheartening! We had spread so much mulch in the spring and I thought we had conquered the weeds. In a few short weeks, with a lot of rain and sunshine, the weeds had taken over our orderly garden

I wanted to give up for the summer and let weeds take over when a fellow gardener came along side me and encouraged me – “we can do this, we don’t have to let the weeds take over!” How I needed that little bit of encouragement and reminder that I do not have to go it alone. Within a few weeks, with everyone pitching in, we had knocked down the weeds and brought order to our garden.

I was reminded how easily weeds to take over my spiritual garden and how much we need each other for encouragement. Weeds of unforgiveness, gossip and prayerlessness so easily take the place of the things I truly want to cultivate in my life – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and self-control (Galatians 5:22). Like the garden that requires constant weeding, we need to give attention to our spiritual lives. Our spiritual lives require a constant infusion of prayer, Bible study and encouraging words from fellow believers in order to yield the fruit of the spirit.

Where can we find a place that constantly encourages, teaches, and builds us up? Come to Grace UMC on Sunday morning! And join us in the Grace Community Garden this spring!

**Prayer:**

Lord help us weed out the sin in our own life and seek ways to build each other up. Help us encourage and urge each other to live lives worthy of God, who calls us into his kingdom and glory. (From 1 Thessalonians 2:12)

**About the Author:**

My name is Beth Anderson. Allan and I enjoy being a part of our local church. I serve in the Children’s Sunday School teaching my favorite people – 3 and 4-year olds, sing with the wonderful ladies of the Treble Ensemble and weed in the Grace Community Garden.

**Wednesday, April 05, 2023**

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 29:11 (NRSV)

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

**Message:**

I have probably known Barry for 25 years. Barry grew up in a Jewish family and celebrated the Jewish High Holy Days. He married Nancy who was a Roman Catholic. When they started to have children, it was important to them that their children have a faith-base. Their children were raised with both the Jewish Traditions and the Christian Traditions. Barry and Nancy wanted their children to make their own faith decisions.

The children grew up in the music program of Grace Church since they were 4. They also participated in youth group, youth praise band, and Sunday school. Barry and Nancy came to Grace Church to support their children.

Barry also realized that God was supporting him. Whenever Rudy would give the invitation to communion, Rudy would say that the table was open to everyone. Barry would take communion. Barry reads the Hebrew Scriptures in Hebrew on Christmas Eve and his son would translate the Hebrew into English. Barry heard sermons about God's love and care for him and his family. This was all through the people and ministries of Grace church.

Now Barry is going through a major life challenge. Barry texted me, "This will be a difficult Christmas this year for all of us but the outcome is for many more blessings after. Thank you for your continued prayers. God bless you all. He also texted, "And again I am witness to the blessings of prayers being answered."

Barry has definitely grown in his love of God and in his faith through the caring ministries of Grace United Methodist Church. He knows that God watches over us all including Barry and his family.

**Prayer:**

Dear God, thank you that you are with us in all aspects of our lives. Even when we face challenges, we know we can turn to you for hope. Let us be a hope-filled people. Amen

**About the Author:**

Rev. Milton Rodgers has been the Minister of Music and Organist at Grace Church for 31 years. He studied music in Princeton and in Germany and was ordained in 2001. He loves working with all of the people of Grace Church.

**Thursday, April 06, 2023**

**Scripture:** Matthew 26: 14-16

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests 15and said, “What will you give me if I betray him to you?” They paid him thirty pieces of silver. 16And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.



“Waiting for Judas” Original oil on panel. 16” x 20”

**Message:**

Jesus sitting on the edge of heaven. Staring out over the universe. Waiting for the arrival of Judas! Judas, the betrayer, to be personally greeted and welcomed into heaven by the Lord himself! What's this all about?

Perhaps Judas was part of the plan? A pawn offered to the Devil to facilitate our belief and understanding of the Messiah and need for a death and resurrection. Judas was overtaken by the Devil. How else can it be explained that Judas would sell the person he knew to be the Son of God for 30 pieces of silver? The Devil could not have conceived of a more perverted act than for Judas, a disciple, to betray his Lord with a kiss. The role Judas would play with the Devil was known to Christ; Jesus accepted it as part of the whole sequence of events that had to be played out to validate the scriptures. As we know the story, the events of Easter could not have played out without Judas!

When the deed was done, the Devil released Judas and Judas only then comprehended what he had done. He was a disciple after all! He was a chosen member of the Lord's original inner circle of a trusted twelve. When the reality, the enormity, of what he had done settled over him, he was torn with grief and committed suicide.

Judas. Not a villain. A necessary pawn in the grand scheme of the universe. A universe worthy of even the Lord's contemplation, while waiting the arrival of Judas. Jesus died for the sins of all, including Judas. If Judas could not be forgiven, there is no hope for me. How hard can it be then, for me to forgive the sins of others?

**Prayer:**

Our father who art in heaven, forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

**About the author:**

Denny DuBois graciously shares his artwork with the congregation each year in the Lenten Devotional. For that, we are grateful.

**Friday, April 07, 2023**

**Scripture:** Matthew 27:54

When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were awestruck, and exclaimed, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

**Message:**

It's no secret that I'm a fan of Christmas. I am the type of person that likes to leave no holiday uncelebrated, and Christmas is like queen of the holidays, so I'm all in!

And yet, sometimes I wish that Christmas and Good Friday were closer together. Not just so we could see the brutal irony that the little baby born in Bethlehem came to die (though that is true). No, I actually wish we could sing some of our Christmas hymns which warm our hearts so dearly, at the foot of Good Friday's cross.

There's a moment on Christmas Eve that, every year, strikes me to the core. It's not the candlelight Silent Night at the end of the service, though that is lovely. It's the beginning of the service, the opening hymn "O Come All Ye Faithful." Almost always this hymn is our processional hymn, meaning it's a hymn we sing while walking into worship. There's a particular line that, year after year, gets stuck in my throat, and begins to well up in the corners of my eyes.

"Who would not love thee, loving us so dearly?"

It has taken years for me to come to see the cross of Christ as, predominantly, an act of love. For years I could only see it as an act of violence (and it is that). But part of the journey of faith is coming to see things in a new Light. Now, when I survey the wondrous cross, I see sorrow and love flowing mingled down. Now what I see in the cross is the exact kind of love that has saved, is saving, and will save the world as it has saved, is saving, and will save me.

This is a rhetorical question of faith, "Who would not love thee, loving us so dearly?"

And so, at the cross, as at the manger, in faith, O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

**Prayer:**

Give us the eyes of faith, dear Lord, to know that your nature, as your name, is Love. Help us to see your love in the cross, and follow it through to resurrection.

**About the Author:**

Drew Colby in one of the pastors at Grace UMC. Come see him on Sundays.

**Saturday, April 08, 2023**

**Scripture:** John 20: 14-16 (NRSV)

When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher).

**Message:** An Ode to RT

It's been almost 6.5 years and I don't think I have ever said, “Thank you” to Rudy Tucker. Maybe I did not have the right words or maybe deep down I know that Rudy doesn't expect me to or require me to say it. I have heard sermons or other things over the years that have reminded me to do it, but I just never have. Once again, something spoke to me as I was preparing to organize this year's Lenten Devotional and I figured this was my story of grace. Oddly enough as I put off writing my story, I couldn't recall what it was that triggered the thank you thought again, instead I will quote from Drew's Easter 2022 sermon about a Living God.

Erika and I have always been self-reliant and independent people. Our nearest family members live in Front Royal, so we haven't really leaned on family for support with the kids when we needed to be at work and one of them was sick. We just figured it out. When money was tight, we figured it out. We have always just figured it out when facing any challenge. When Erika was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2016, we attacked it like any other challenge...alone. Yes, we had family and friends do some things along the way and her parents came to stay on surgery days (all of which we are grateful), but the fight against cancer is not a one day fight.

Erika was scheduled for a double mastectomy on September 15, 2016. Erika's parents were at home with the boys while Erika and I were at the hospital alone. I don't know if we told anyone outside of family and close friends that the surgery was happening. We did all the check-in things and were in the last prep room before surgery when the curtain opened and Rudy Tucker walked in. Rudy asked if he could pray with us before Erika headed back for surgery. Rudy led us in prayer and then Erika was rolled away for surgery. We might have mentioned to Rudy that Erika was having surgery, but did not expect him to show up.

What does this have to do with Lent, Easter, or God's grace? Let me see if I can bring it all together. Rudy has been referred to many times as the church gardener. I felt like Mary as we were in a tiny prep room – a cave – a tomb, the gardener showed up, he spoke and I knew it was our teacher, and he brought God's grace that morning. As Drew said last Easter, “This kind of moment in a person's life appears to be where we encounter the Living God, the Risen Christ; where the Spirit that raised Christ Jesus from the dead shows up, usually in the flesh of some other person. That's when and where Christ shows up to minister to real people living real lives, to move them from doubt toward faith, from despair toward hope, and from shame toward love.”

Jesus Christ, the gardener, showed up in the flesh of another person that day – Rudy Tucker. He showed up to minister to real people going through something in real lives to lead us toward faith, hope, and love. So finally, today, I say “Thank you Rudy Tucker.” Thank you for showing up and bringing God's grace that morning. Thank you for letting me know I was not alone on that very long and lonely morning. God's grace got me through that morning and continues to get us through each follow up appointment of remission.

**Prayer:**

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn His face to you and give you peace. Amen.

**About the author:**

Jonathan Bukva is the Chair of the Grace Leadership Board and compiler of the Lenten Devotional each year. He thanks all who contribute to it each year and thanks all the readers as well.