



Sermons from Northwood United Church

**“Grace that will not be denied”
2 Samuel 11:26-12:13(a)
Will Sparks August 5, 2012**

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives, be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

When you think of God’s grace, what do you think of? You may, like many people draw a kind of blank. I often use the word grace to talk about our relationship with God and I have been asked a number of time, just what do you mean by grace? I remember in bible study a while ago the subject of grace came up and I remember the silence as we tried to figure out what it really means.

A minister friend of mine said once that “We ministers and theologians throw the word grace around but do we ever really say what we mean by it? Do we ever really define it?”

Fair comment, so here it is folks. And I want to talk about grace in its many forms.

First of all, probably the most common way we talk about grace, and that is physical grace. I live with a dancer, and I am learning about grace. Nobody who has ever watched me dance would ever call the word grace to mind. But when Julia floats across the floor, yes, that is grace. There is an apparent ease that makes a really good dancer just seem to float through the universe. It is like there is a wave length, a frequency of the body that some people can tap into that allows them to move with ease and beauty, and, well, grace. An ingredient that opens up a whole new dimension to what it means to be alive.

The grace of God is not unlike that. There is an ingredient that allows us to move from what is, to what could be, a spiritual energy that is both within a beyond us that moves us toward wholeness and healing, beauty and peace. It is grace that makes it possible for the alcoholic to finally go to AA and it is grace that moves to keep him there. There is an ingredient that no one can simply add, but that in the fullness of time, is simply there, received, given, as a gift. It is grace that we recognize when we look at our children and marvel at what has happened and how little we can take the credit for it. Oh we do our best and that is so very important, but really, grace has made them and grace will sustain them. It is grace, moving in our hearts that allows us to start again after a major loss. You can’t just make it happen. We want to heal; we want to move on. We try, and finally one day we notice that it is happening. That is grace. So for me grace, the spiritual kind, is that wondrous ingredient in life that unsticks us when we are stuck, that makes impossible situations possible, that gets us past our small selves enough to become our true and deepest selves.

But grace, though always to our benefit is not always a welcome guest. Take the story of David and Nathan. What an amazing story. David is often lauded as the greatest leader in Hebrew history and for no small reason. There was true greatness in him. But he was not always great; there was also smallness in him. In fact last week and this week in the lectionary we have heard the story of David at his worst. Let’s just look at it the whole story.

2 Samuel 11:1- 12:13ff

I believe that God’s grace was at work in the voice of Nathan throwing back into David’s face what he had done until he owned up, until finally he addressed what he had done. You see

God's grace can be tough. I believe that when we, like David, are avoiding our own issues, our own sin, our own brokenness, God's grace is tenacious and brings it back into our view.

I met a woman once named Pam who told me the story of how she had grown up in a very white Anglo-Saxon family: two major sides- Welsh and Scottish. She had always thought that was all there was to her family. All through her life though, she had been drawn to native communities, native spirituality. When there was native drumming, she found something inside of her stir. Her mother died, and in the papers that were left to her was a hand sketched family tree that went back several generations to a woman whose name was Elizabeth Remier. And written on the bottom of that tree was a note: "This is your line."

Who is Elizabeth Remier? That is not Scottish or Welsh.

So she went back to New Brunswick and asked, and out of the shadows of her family emerged a native woman who had had a baby with a Welsh ancestor, but beyond that, had nothing to do with her family. After all, they were Welsh and Scottish! The forgotten, submerged woman emerges out of the shadows generations later, and Pam begins to understand what has stirred within her.

To me that is grace. Pam is stuck. But eventually, and I believe inevitably, truth emerges, and most often it emerges by some unseen hand of grace, a letter written to the future: "This is your line." Nathan the prophet hears what has happened and refuses to let it go. "You are that man." Sometimes God's grace is pesky and tenacious. One of the reasons I say to people, never give up because you never know what will emerge, is because I have seen over and over again God's unexpected, tenacious hand of grace emerge.

Have you ever had a falling out with someone and you didn't get an opportunity to actually hash it out and agree to disagree or to reconcile in some way. It is just sort of left. And then every time you are in the same place with that same person there is a kind of uncomfortable avoiding that happens. Well, I believe that discomfort is there for a reason- tenacious grace placing that unresolved issue before us again and crying out for us to face it. Face it. Resolve this unfinished thread in the fabric of your life. And in my experience, grace doesn't give up. It will not be denied.

We are celebrating communion today, and communion is the ritual of grace ongoing in the Christian community. Jesus said, I am the bread of life. I am the ingredient in your diet that will bring about life that is free and full and grace filled even though you may know nothing about it, not expect it, even expect the opposite. Sometimes it is hard to believe in grace, in the seemingly impossible movement from stuck to unstuck. Sometimes we can lose hope for miracle, hope that somehow things will work out. But come to the table. Just keep coming to the table. And I believe that somehow for you and for whatever is stuck in your life and in this world, grace will emerge. For grace is tenacious, and will not be denied. Amen.