

Grace of God – John Marshall - 2012

I don't know about you, but I really love a line in our Collect today. In it, we are asking God to "Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of His (Jesus') countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory". In case you didn't know, countenance is defined in Webster's as having calm expression and mental composure. And if you haven't yet taken note of the story of the passion of Christ, He went through some heinous things in the path to His crucifixion, yet He maintained a calmness and mental composure that we would do well to emulate during our, and you must admit this, menial and trivial trials and tribulations. Since He is the "Way" for us Christians, we would also do well to examine this closely. Jesus was not overwhelmed by His circumstances but He seemed to fuel Himself and was guided by His focus on Faith and Hope in our Father.

So why is it that we so often focus on our lack? Why is it that we almost always let negative things steer us in the way of cynicism and grasping at empty things in which to satisfy our lacks? It has even gotten to the point where it seems that we are all finding cynicism and cynical remarks about things to be cute. It's fashionable to be bleak and see things with droll overtones. We seem to heap dirt on hope and cast a mocking eye on faith. Worst of all, we seem to ignore our Grace and it shows in how being graceful is a lost trait in this world of ours.

You show Grace when you appreciate what God has already blessed you with and move in that appreciation. It is a confidence not born of arrogance but born out of knowing God is always with you and will always provide for you. Grace does not abide with being selfish or self centered and it takes joy in the advancement and progress of others. You know a person who focuses on Grace when you see them and when you are around them. They seem to make things and people around them brighter. And nothing ever seems to bring them down. You wanna be like that right? Would you like for it to be said that you were a Graceful person?

Take a deep deep look into your life and I dare you to say that you have not been mightily blessed in it. Regardless of the problems you face, and yes, we all have our problems, you are bathed in the miracle of your blessings. Breathe in and breathe out. Isn't that a miracle? None of us can truly say that they live without love. We may not pay attention to it all the time but that love is there as we live and breathe. We are all blessed in the unique personalities that we are. No one is quite like us. Once more, when we pay attention, there is always something or someone, most of the time both, that makes us smile everyday. We all have many many things in which we should be thankful for. We forget this way too often. We concentrate too much on our deficits. We all should concentrate more on what we already have. It is only through what we have that we can build anything of worth in our lives. Yet, when we concentrate too much on what we don't have, we grasp at things that do not have any meaning. For example, we all wish we had more money. You're lying if you say you don't. But money, in of itself, will never bring you the happiness you seek. Certainly, it can make things more comfortable, but in of itself, it cannot make you happy or truly contented. Contentment is fed by more substantial things. It is fed by love. It is fed by being appreciated and by the act of appreciation. It is fed

by feeling that you matter in life, you matter to other people and the world. Money can be stolen, but contentment cannot. It can be given away or ignored but it can never be stolen from you. Once more, we all have the resources in our hearts and souls in which to feed our capacity for content and joy.

Why do we so often ignore this about ourselves? Why is it that we seem to dwell on the darkness and lack in our lives? I suspect that it is because we do, indeed, heap dirt upon the hope in our hearts so as that it covers up our access to it. I suspect that it is because we greatly underestimate the sheer power of our Faith. I suspect that it has a lot to do with an undue under appreciation for who we are and what we are already blessed with. We are all luminous beings. We are all made to bring our specific and individual light to the world. If you think of yourself as being any less than that then you are truly deluded and I feel truly sorry for you. You have such a capacity to bring light and love to the people in your life. You have such a magnificent capacity to bring joy to lives. All you have to do is to tap into the uniqueness that is you and not onto what you think you lack. First of all, you cannot gain anything by concentrating on that, anyway. Like I said before, you cannot build anything of substance concentrating on deficit. You must use the unlimited blessings that you have already as a resource to become prosperous or successful. I am not just talking about the empty prosperity or success that we normally talk about or seek. I am talking about the prosperity and success that really brings true contentment and feeds our ability to be graceful human beings. Our blessings doesn't become our Grace until we begin to appreciate them. We cannot truly move forward without this. We are stuck in the mire of negativity without our turning our blessings into perceived Grace. Being graceful is bringing our awareness to bear on our blessings. This world of ours has made it easy for us to forget this. We overlook and ignore what is Holy. And everything around us is Holy. I have said this before, but everywhere is a burning bush and we are always standing on hallowed ground because there is nowhere without the presence of God. If it comes from God's hands, how can it not be Holy? Every moment that we live has it. We have just got to pay attention to it and notice it. And we have to acknowledge its movement in our lives. This is the only way we can move forward because it causes forward movement. Concentrating on deficit only causes stagnation and the movement that we perceive we make when we focus on it is the circular movement of spinning our wheels. True gain cannot be made this way.

This is the last Sunday of the Epiphany, and the Epiphany for us Christians is a time for us to realize the meaning and the value of Christ coming into our lives. He came to show us the Way. He shows us the Way in which to love others. He shows us the Way in which to love our Father, the Creator of all things. He shows us the Way in which to live in this world, foibles and all. He shows us, more importantly, on how to live with Grace. This is what is talked about in our Collect today. We should learn by the Grace He showed while He was being prepared for and during the crucifixion. Though we all have our own crosses to bear, we must all recognize that they are significantly lighter than the one He bore. Can we say that we bear ours as gracefully as He? I suspect not. Still it is something we all should strive for. I believe His Grace during all that was born out of His intense hope and intense faith. When we bear our perceived crosses,

we should concentrate on being Graceful like that. Our light will become magnified when we do this. No one ever had the abundance of Jesus in the eyes of we Christians, yet we have that same abundance when we love others and have a close relationship to and love God. We all have it within ourselves to build our ways out of our problems and perceived deficits. Being thankful is the way to bringing more fruit in your life. Praising God for the blessings He has given you and is constantly bringing to you is the way to even more blessings.

So what it comes down to is appreciating the constant miracles that are in your life and if you look deeply, there are plenty. Yes, things can overwhelm us and our problems always seem to cloud our ability to see the Grace in our lives. It's always there but we hide it when we cannot see beyond our lacks. We tend to diminish ourselves when we allow this to happen.

Lent is coming up and it is the time that is seen for giving things up. Here's an idea. Let's give up focusing on the negative things in this world and in our lives. Let's give up our cynicism and the dark way we view ourselves and others. Let's give up grabbing onto things that do not help us to prosper in any meaningful way. Let's bear our crosses with the joy in our hearts because we know that God will always help us to find our way through it all. Let us give up the faulty perception that we do not have what we need to help us to move forward with Grace. Let's become more graceful beings and thank God for our Grace of just being. Amen!