

Marching with Grace
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First Church of East Hartford
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This week we continue our journey with the Israelites,
traveling from Egypt to the Promised Land,
on their way to freedom.
We will look at how grace is a key component of freedom.

[Prayer]

In an hour the largest climate march in history will step off in the streets of New York.
Hundreds of thousands of people are marching for the People's Climate March,
complete with over a dozen marching bands, floats, and cheers.
The secretary of the United Nations has called a special meeting of world leaders -
actual leaders and not representatives from different nations.
the topic is climate change.
next September it is poverty.
The two are closely linked:
we know that as climate change escalates, more people will be displaced into poverty.
And so world leaders are gathering to make a united plan.
And so hundreds of thousands of people are cheering in the streets,
calling for concrete actions to curb climate change.
The people in NYC are joined by solidarity actions around the world.
Hundreds of actions through every continent.
Will you raise your hand if you have participated in a march or rally for a cause you cared
about?

Why?

People march because they see something in the world that isn't right
AND
they believe they can help make it different.

In Christian theological language,
they see the sin of the world,
ask for grace,
receive grace that frees them from guilt, shame, and self-doubt,
and then lend their support for the building up of the kingdom of heaven that Jesus pointed to.

Grace is foundational for taking action like the folks marching in New York.
Grace is also foundational for taking actions closer to home -
like growing in our relationships with family members we don't get along with
Grace is foundational for living fully in our world.
Grace frees us for life-affirming action.

Louise did a lovely job of explaining to the children the basics of grace.
Grace is receiving blessings, especially when we least deserve it.

Grace is being paid for a day's worth of work, when we only worked an hour. [Matt]
Grace is finding manna morning by morning, even though we grumble about not having enough.
[Exodus]

Grace is God deciding not to destroy a city because they have listened & changed their ways.
[Jonah]

Grace is what picks you up when you have hit rock bottom -
whether you hit rock bottom out of your own foolish choices or
you hit rock bottom because our society put one too many barriers in your way,
or some combination

Grace is the friend who drives you when your car breaks down.

Grace is finding the food bank when the bank account ran out

Grace is being accepted for all of who you are.

Grace is being welcomed no who you are or where you are on life's journey.

And

Grace frees us for life-affirming action.

after receiving manna through the grace of God,
the Israelites are free to travel through the desert,
unburdened by worries for food and unburdened by the need to physically carry food

after the city of Nineva is saved by the grace of God,
the people are free to rejoice and live in right relationship with one another,
caring for the poor and lonely.

after the laborers of Matthew's Gospel are paid a living wage by the grace of God,
the laborers are free to eat, to provide for their families,
to feel the confidence and joy that comes with being hired for a job

Grace frees us for life-affirming actions.

Have you ever held a secret? ever held on to something you were ashamed of?
something you were afraid to share, because people might reject you if you shared?

Does anyone here watch Modern Family? How I Met Your Mother?

Modern Family:

Manny, a 9yrs old boy, breaks into someone else's locker at school. With the help of his mom.
But his mom swears him to secrecy. But Manny's dad knows something is up. Manny is fidgeting and squirming in the back seat on the car ride home. Through some simple questions Manny starts sweating and shaking. Eventually he blurts out his confession.

How I Met Your Mother:

Marshall is really close to his Dad. They call all the time. But only with the good stuff. So when Marshall is having trouble having a baby with his wife, he stops calling his Dad 'cause he is so ashamed. Well, Dad gets worried 'cause his son hasn't been calling, so he hopes on a plane to visit him. When Dad arrives, Marshall literally tries to hide in the bathroom. He finally comes out, paces around the house, fumbles with a lie and then his wife blurts out the truth. The air clears. Dad sits down with his son and assures him that he is loved, grandchild or not.

These are sitcoms, but they show the anxiety people feel when trying to hold a shameful secret in - even if the secret shouldn't be that shameful.

It also shows the freedom that comes after the confession and after the forgiveness -
they show, on a small scale, the freedom of grace:
Manny/Marshall can relax and be his whole self in relationship with his Dad

That is what God wants for us: to be our whole selves.
When we are our whole selves, we can actually do the good we need to do.
Grace frees us for life-affirming action.
We are free to be in deep, honest, and true relationship with loved ones.
We aren't spending time trying to hide behind a facade.
I think of Jonah, who so wants to be right and perfect that he gets angry at God for grace
This is simply a hilarious story. [retell]

God is pointing out to Jonah that Jonah ought to be more concerned about the well-being of others than about being perfect.

Part of grace is letting go of being perfect or completely right -
it is admitting we aren't always right
and in doing so, we are free to take life-affirming actions.
Grace frees us from the need to have it all together before taking one step.

Earlier I said that grace is foundational for the huge People's Climate March in NYC today.

One of the biggest reasons people don't take action on important issues is
because they don't really think their actions can make a difference
People get overwhelmed with the immensity of the problem,
and don't believe their actions are enough.
The thing is, no one person's actions are enough or even fully adequate -
that is where grace steps in.
Grace knows we are not enough by ourselves.
Grace knows we make mistakes and we aren't perfect.
Grace frees people to say, "I may not have all the answers or be perfect in making it happen,
but I got a step in the right direction and I'm willing to try."
Grace frees us to keep trying for life-affirming action.

Grace is the action in which God clears away the secrecy and guilt and self-doubt
and amplifies our goodness.

Where in your life do you need grace?
What life-affirming action would you take if you received that grace?

May we be washed in grace, drenched in grace,
that from that grace may we commit our whole selves to life-affirming actions. Amen.