

Thoughts on Grace  
by Danielle Dunbar, Stewardship Chair

I'd like to share some thoughts about "grace" and ask you to think about how it has affected your life recently. Here's an excerpt from Frederick Buechner:

*Grace is something you can never get but only be given. There's no way to earn it or deserve it...*

*A good sleep is grace and so are good dreams. Most tears are grace. The smell of rain is grace. Somebody loving you is grace. Loving somebody is grace. Have you ever **tried** to love somebody?*

*A crucial eccentricity of the Christian faith is the assertion that people are saved by grace. ... There's nothing you have to **do**.*

*The grace of God means something like: Here is your life. You might never have been, but you are because the party wouldn't have been complete without you. Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us. It's for you I created the universe. I love you.*

*There's only one catch. Like any other gift, the gift of grace can be yours only if you'll reach out and take it.*

*Maybe being able to reach out and take it is a gift, too.*

When the weather turned cold, I accepted one of God's gifts when I put my beautiful down comforter and warm winter bedding on and tucked away the summer quilt. On its own that is a lovely gift but a little privileged. Going a little deeper, it reminds me how blessed I am, blessed to have a safe and weatherproof home to find shelter in at the end of every day. Instead of worrying about where I should seek shelter for the night with the temperatures dropping or a storm coming, I simply drive home. Last week, I accepted a different kind of gift as the tears ran down my cheeks and my college freshman drove off again to head back to school. She is a gift in her own right, made in God's image. Her life is also a beautiful and awesome gift that has been entrusted to me by God. It is a gift and a privilege to be responsible for feeding, clothing, educating and spiritually shaping her. How about you? What are some ways you have received God's gifts recently?

In terms of our stewardship discussion, I want to remind us that grace and these gifts or blessings are unearned favor and they are free. We do not need to pay for them in any way but we can respond to them.

I do not give a large percentage of my income to St. Stephen's because I have some really great flannel sheets. Receiving the blessing of warmth and security is a door that I can walk through to encounter God. By choosing to accept the gifts of God that exist all around me, I am

reminded that He should be at the center of my life. And if He is the center of my life, my significant financial offerings help make that relationship a two way street, receiving and giving, concrete. My proportional giving to St. Stephen's is not a contract with God because he gave me something but an offering. When we are given a great gift like grace, we can't help but want to respond to it. My annual pledge is a gift to God that He blesses and puts to work in the ministry of our church. Which in turn blesses me and so many in our community and beyond. My gift to St. Stephen's completes the circle of giving and of blessings.

We are asking our congregation to pray about and consider what our individual offerings will be this year. I hope we will all consider the ultimate gift of grace and the blessings we encounter every day as we make our response. I hope we will make a commitment this year if we haven't before and that we increase that gift by some percent every year if we already give. Thank you for being a blessing to this church, and thanks be to God for His Grace.