



White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church

Grow Your Soul & Serve the World

www.wbuuc.org | 652.426.2369 | 328 Maple Street | Mahtomedi, MN 55115

Theme for May

Grace – the practice of noticing

Each month, our church gathers around a monthly theme and practice to guide our congregational life: worship, small groups, religious education, justice, and classes. Use these readings for reflection around the dinner table, in your own prayer practice, alone or with others.

More online at www.wbuuc.org/themes.

QUESTIONS

How have you experienced moments of grace?

How do you practice noticing beauty and love in your life?

In what ways do you experience beauty and love in life that are unearned, or 'graced'?

How does noticing gifts of life call you to live with more compassion or love?

QUOTES

Grace is the kindling of the heart and the illuminating of the mind.

- *John S. Dunne in The Music of Time*

Community is another source of grace. In community we are meant to grace one another; to be sources of grace; healers by way of grace.

- *Matthew Fox in Confessions*

All there is to thinking is seeing something noticeable, which makes you see something you weren't noticing, which makes you see something that isn't even visible.

- *Leo Strauss*

Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it, because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace.

- *Frederick Buechner, Now and Then: A Memoir of Vocation*

I am going to try to pay attention to the spring. I am going to look around at all the flowers, and look up at the hectic trees. I am going to close my eyes and listen.

- *Anne Lamott*

The range of what we think and do
Is limited by what we fail to notice
And because we fail to notice
There is little we can do
To change
Until we notice
How failing to notice
Shapes our thoughts and deeds.

- *R.D. Laing*

POETRY & LYRICS

Bird-Understander

Of many reasons I love you here is one

the way you write me from the gate at the airport
so I can tell you everything will be alright

so you can tell me there is a bird
trapped in the terminal all the people
ignoring it because they do not know
what to do with it except to leave it alone
until it scares itself to death

it makes you terribly terribly sad

You wish you could take the bird outside
and set it free or (failing that)
call a bird-understander
to come help the bird

All you can do is notice the bird
and feel for the bird and write
to tell me how language feels
impossibly useless

but you are wrong

You are a bird-understander
better than I could ever be
who make so many noises
and call them song

These are your own words
your way of noticing
and saying plainly
of not turning away
from hurt

you have offered them
to me I am only
giving them back

if only I could show you
how very useless
they are not

- Craig Arnold

SAYING GRACE

Corn and grain, meat and milk
Upon our table width and length
With loving thought and careful craft
Through so many hands have passed
Essence of life, fruits of our labors
Bringing sustenance and strength
To ours and all our neighbors
May we all be grateful for all we have
And compassion for those without.

From the freshly baked breads
To delicious meats and treats
This meal is the work
Of many hands
For all of us to share
From the seeds in the field
And animals in the barn
To this table of family and friends
Hard work has provided us
A bounty of tender, loving care.

READINGS & EXCERPTS

Grace for Darlene Wind and James Welch

I think of Wind and her wild ways the year we had nothing to lose and lost it anyway in the cursed country of the fox. We still talk about that winter, how the cold froze imaginary buffalo on the stuffed horizon of snowbanks. The haunting voices of the starved and mutilated broke fences, crashed our thermostat dreams, and we couldn't stand it one more time. So once again we lost a winter in stubborn memory, walked through cheap apartment walls, skated through fields of ghosts into a town that never wanted us, in the epic search for grace.

Like Coyote, like Rabbit, we could not contain our terror and clowned our way through a season of false midnights. We had to swallow that town with laughter, so it would go down easy as honey. And one morning as the sun struggled to break ice, and our dreams had found us with coffee and pancakes in a truck stop along Highway 80, we found grace.

I could say grace was a woman with time on her hands, or a white buffalo escaped from memory. But in that dingy light it was a promise of balance. We once again understood the talk of animals, and spring was lean and hungry with the hope of children and corn.

I would like to say, with grace, we picked ourselves up and walked into the spring thaw. We didn't; the next season was worse. You went home to Leech Lake to work with the tribe and I went south. And, Wind, I am still crazy. I know there is something larger than the memory of a dispossessed people. We have seen it

- Joy Harjo

From The Elegance of the Hedgehog

I began to understand why I felt this sudden joy when Kakuro was talking about the birch trees. I get the same feeling when anyone talks about trees, any trees: the linden tree in the farmyard, the oak behind the old barn, the stately elms that have all disappeared now, the pine trees along wind-swept coasts, etc. There's so much humanity in a love of trees, so much nostalgia for our first sense of wonder, so much power in just feeling our own insignificance when we are surrounded by nature...yes, that's it: just thinking about trees and their indifferent majesty and our love for them teaches us how ridiculous we are—vile parasites squirming *on the surface* of the earth—and at the same time how deserving of life we can be, when we can honor this beauty that owes us nothing.

- Muriel Barbery