

January Theme ***Grace: The Practice of Salvation***

America, America, God shed his grace on thee, And crown thy good with brotherhood, from sea to shining sea. ~ Katharine Lee Bates

Introduction

Each of us may see various meanings upon hearing the word *grace*: Smoothness and elegance of movement, as we glide through the dance of life; Courteous good will, in our relations with others, sometimes characterized as a respectful, polite manner of behaving; and, in Christian belief, “the free and unmerited favor of God, as manifested in the salvation of sinners and the bestowal of blessings”. Accordingly, Christian grace cannot be earned but is there for the faithful if only they express faith in God. Unitarian Universalists are likely to struggle with this last definition, wrestling with “God”, “sinners” and “blessings”, words whose definitions might feel like they belong to other faiths.

But we can claim them as part of our Universalist inheritance by accepting that everyone is destined for “salvation”, which means *to be healed*, *to be made whole*. And aren’t we all broken, my friends, not by some ecclesiastically defined “original sin” but through our lifelong struggle to find our complete, wholly loving selves?

Universalist theology teaches that every soul is worthy, dignified beyond the possibility of any imagined Hell, regardless of any committed wrongdoings. This is the salvation that we choose in our chosen faith.

Grace has the same word origin as *gratia*, thankfulness. To live a life filled with grace is more than a pause and a prayer before each meal; it is to be grateful for every moment of being, every smile, every breath.

Can we accept the joys of life graciously, without needing to earn every blessing? Can we dance deftly through our days, and pause between, with steps of deep sorrow? Can we offer courteous goodwill to all, as it is ours to share generously and to receive in return? And is it possible that all of these acts of *grace* are expressions of the essence that we choose to call *Spirit of Life*?

Questions, for reflection and discussion

1. What does “grace” mean to you? What feelings does it raise in you? Do you have positive or negative immediate associations with this word?
2. Describe a time when you experienced grace. Or a time when you yearned for grace and were left empty.
3. Do you seek or shun “salvation”? Is that an idea that you think can be claimed by Unitarian Universalists, or is it owned by other religions?
4. What would it mean to you to be “made whole”?
5. Do you find a connection between salvation and joy? What practices take you there?
6. In what ways can you share, and raise, grace in others?
7. Do you believe (if you believe) that salvation is a solely individual transaction, or might be a communal deliverance? How might salvation be contagious?

8. If salvation is once gained, can it be lost? Must you surrender something to reach salvation? To accept grace?

Quotes

Grace is not something simply to be claimed; it is meant to be demonstrated. -Chuck Swindoll

Shame says that because I am flawed I am unacceptable; Grace says that though I am flawed I am cherished. - author unknown

Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within. I use the word "love" here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace - not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth. - [James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time](#)

Grace isn't a little prayer that you say before receiving a meal; it's a way of life.

Infuse your life with action. Don't wait for it to happen. Make it happen. Make your own future. Make your own hope. Make your own love. And whatever your beliefs, honor your creator, not by passively waiting for grace to come down from upon high, but by doing what you can to make grace happen... yourself, right now, right down here on Earth. - Bradley Whitford

When grace is joined with wrinkles, it is adorable. There is an unspeakable dawn in happy old age. - Victor Hugo

For me, every hour is grace. And I feel gratitude in my heart each time I can meet someone and look at his or her smile. - Elie Wiesel

People to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too. -William Faulkner (As I Lay Dying)

Individual science fiction stories may seem as trivial as ever to the blinder critics and philosophers of today, but the core of science fiction -- its essence -- has become crucial to our salvation, if we are to be saved at all. - Isaac Asimov

Teenagers read millions of books every year. They read for entertainment and for education. They read because of school assignments and pop culture fads. And there are millions of teens who read because they are sad and lonely and enraged. They read because they live in an often-terrible world. They read because they believe despite the callow protestations of certain adults that books-especially the dark and dangerous ones-will save them. - Sherman Alexie

Even if no salvation should come, I want to be worthy of it at every moment. - Franz Kafka
The grace of salvation, the grace of Christian wholeness that flowers in silence, dispels this
 For more on this month's theme go to: <http://uuac.org/worship/themes-for-spiritual-practice/>

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illusion of separation. For when the mind is brought to stillness, and all our strategies of acquisition have dropped, a deeper truth presents itself: we are and have always been one with God and we are all one in God. – Martin Laird, Into the Silent Land.

Sources

* UU Principles and the Sources: <https://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/principles>

<https://www.brainyquote.com/topics/grace>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRUjr8EVgBg> (*America the Beautiful*; Ray Charles)

What's So Amazing About Grace? Quotes by Philip Yancey – Goodreads

<https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/1616396-what-s-so-amazing-about-grace>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDdvReNKKuk> (“Amazing Grace”; worth a listen).

Faith, friends, we are all in this together.

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