

# Simple Gifts



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*The All Souls Journal*

## Wrestling with Grace

-by Rev. Marlin Lavanhar, Senior Minister



My grandmother's name was Grace. It is a good name for a grandmother. Grandparents are well known for unconditional love. They usually do not have to discipline the grandchildren and they often come bearing gifts regard-

less of whether we (or our parents) think we deserve them. My grandmother Grace was that way.

The word "grace" is often defined as an undeserved blessing or unearned gift from God. In the Judeo-Christian heritage it is taught that God's gift of grace is given regardless of how righteous or noble we may be. It is a concept of radical inclusiveness. One of my favorite Biblical examples is in the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel. In the story, Jacob has just deceived his aged father and cheated his brother. He is sleeping out in the open and is vulnerable

and there are many ways we can imagine God could have punished him. Attack by a wild animal or a lightning bolt from the sky are two obvious possibilities for divine retribution. Yet, what does God do? God comes and gives Jacob a blessing and makes him the father of an entire people.

Despite who we are and what we have done, whether we believe in a God or not, we receive blessings.

One of the most obvious of these blessings is our life, our ability to enjoy this glorious creation. We didn't do anything to merit being given the breath of life. When I am feeling sad or depressed I like to wander in nature to witness the beauty of the world. It is often seeing the sunset or the moonrise or an owl in flight that I feel restored and reawakened.



**Grace:**

*Petunia's  
Grace*



*Unmerited  
Grace*



*The Middle Path  
to Grace*



*Sacred Time  
and Grace*

Moments of grace also come sometimes from an unsought word of encouragement, a beautiful piece of music in the midst of a difficult time, or a sudden and surprising success. Life is filled with these instances of unexpected blessings no matter who we are or what we have done. Grace often surprises us just when we need it most – just when we are about to lose faith or fall into despair.

There is nothing we can do to deserve grace, and nothing we can do that will make it unavailable. All we need to do is be open to it. The Hindu teacher Ramakrishna has said, “The winds of divine grace are always blowing; it is for us to raise our sails.”

Hoist your sail dear friend, and know that you are blessed! †



**O**ur church program-year (September-May) is fashioned around nine theological themes. Each theme plays a part in the development of a well-grounded religious and spiritual life. The church’s offerings each month are by no means limited to the themes. However, these topics provide an axis around which many elements of church life gain more meaning and depth. They provide us with a set of common stories and ideas that become elements of an ongoing community conversation. Be warned: Seriously engaging these themes could transform your life!

*September - Vocation & Calling*  
*October - Unity*  
*November - Gratitude*  
*December - Peace*  
*January - Grace*  
*February - Prayer & Spiritual Practice*  
*March - Letting Go*  
*April - Salvation*  
*May - Truth*

# Petunia's Grace

-by Rev. Tamara Lebak, Associate Minister



After my dog of 17 years, Cayenne, died around Christmas 2007, Jill and I waited until nearly Easter to look for another dog. I was torn apart and didn't know if I could open my heart that much to another animal. Then we found Maddie.

Maddie was a brown brindle Boxer mix and a mess with a huge personality. I took her to dog training classes, and ran with her regularly. One morning after we had had Maddie for barely six months, she got away while we were running and was hit by a car. Maddie died about an hour later in my lap. My reaction surprised even me... it was only two months later that I was looking for another dog. Having had dogs since my first memories on this Earth, I knew there was a hole in my life that only a dog could fill.

In middle school, I had a brown brindle American Staffordshire Bull Terrier (otherwise known as a Pit Bull). This dog was my best friend at the most awkward stage of my growing up, when I was trying to figure out who I was.

Despite their horrendous reputation, I have always had a soft spot in my heart for Pit Bulls. So after Maddie, I went on search for a white Pit. I found her at Ahimsa Rescue Foundation in Muldrow, Oklahoma. *Ahimsa* is a Sanskrit term meaning "do no harm." The owner/operator also has a soft spot for Pit Bulls and takes them in when no one else will. Often in Oklahoma,

these dogs populate our kill shelters and have such a terrible reputation that they are usually not adoptable, so even the puppies are euthanized. Pit Bulls have not always been so feared. The pioneers knew these dogs for their intelligence, devotion, their steady and calm temperament and their fearless protection of children, livestock, and the home.

My little angel looks like a cross between Petey on *Our Gang* and *the Little Rascals* and the trademark RCA dog. She was barely six months old when we adopted her. We named her Petunia Grace. I felt it was Grace that allowed me to open my heart to another dog after Maddie's life was so senselessly taken. I felt it was Grace



that led Petunia to the Ahimsa shelter when she so easily could have been killed in another kind of shelter. With Pit Bull fighting so popular in this part of the country, I felt it was Grace that kept her from dying in a ring for entertainment.

Grace comes to the undeserving, the unlucky, the unworthy. She is as indiscriminate in her visits as Misfortune,

Death, and Grief. So what do we do when we are paid a visit by Grace? Welcome her. Invite her in. Know that she will not stay forever, but that her visit will likely change you for the better. Open your heart to her playfulness and blessings. Wait to grieve her leaving until she is gone but cherish and relish her presence while you can. Give her your full attention for as long as you can, for you never know how long it may be before she will cross your path again. †

# Unmerited, Amazing, Grace

-by Rev. Dr. John B. Wolf, Minister Emeritus



Bill Cosby tells about his little daughter caught climbing up to the top shelf of the kitchen cabinet to raid the family cookie jar. “What are you doing up there, my dear?” asks her father.

“I dunno,” she says.

“Well, then what are you doing with your hand in the cookie jar?” he insists. “I dunno,” she says. From which encounter Mr. Cosby observes that all children are liars and thieves. Which, of course, they are.

I should know. I was one once, and got caught, not with my hand in a cookie jar, but with a classmate’s fountain pen. The word soon got around that I was a thief and a liar. My life was ruined. Until Carl Behr, whose pen it was, asked my buddy, Jack Paar (not that Jack Paar) why he was consorting with such a bad person and – I will never forget what Jack said – he said, “I don’t care if he is a thief. He’s a good thief. He’s my friend.” That changed my life.

Eons ago, people began the struggle with questions of why and wherefore, especially when things go badly. Thence, as early as the dawn of human consciousness, or soon thereafter, came the dayspring of human conscience. It is our fault, through our fault, through our own miserable fault, that bad things happen. Or, if it is not our fault, it is somebody’s. “The sins of the fathers will be visited unto the sons of the second and third generation.” Or, so it is written. “The

wages of sin is death.” Or, should be.

Well, not quite. Along the way, there emerged a deeper awareness. In Biblical history, during the time of the exile in Babylon, a debate arose over why such an evil had befallen the children of Israel. Some argued that it was obvious: the people had been disobedient. It was their own fault. Others, however, maintained that it was not that easy, things cannot be reduced to simple right and wrong. Creation is full of contradictions. Who can possibly know all there is to know, much less all there is to life at any given



moment? Don’t be so quick to judge. “Ripeness is all!” – Shakespeare would sum up in good time.

In other words, it was, as it were, “revealed” that we are rewarded not according to what we do or do not do, or, what we deserve or do not deserve (thank God) in this life, but only according to our capacity to receive what good there is in existence.

It is called grace.

Unmerited, amazing, grace. It is given freely, no strings attached. As when, in the midst of our doubts, comes faith; or, in deepest grief, we are at last comforted; or, in the darkest night of the soul, when we are

hopelessly at fault, through forgiveness, mercy, and love.

Oh, I should not have said “no strings attached,” because there is such a thing as the judgment of grace. As when Jack Paar said what he did. I haven’t stolen a fountain pen since. †

# The Middle Path to Grace

-by Kate Starr, Youth Director



The Christian concept of Grace – unmerited divine assistance – is an idea many of us wrestle with. Maybe it’s my Puritan work ethic or my Humanist parents, but I believe we should have to make some sort of effort to be deserving of God’s grace, to merit divine assistance. And, because some of us have a tendency to question the legitimacy of the Bible’s teachings more than we do those of other religions, I decided to research the concept of Grace through the ages.

Grace is featured in Greek myths. Charis, grace personified, is said to be concealed in small events to help alleviate indifference and despair. Charis grants breathing space to allow the inner life to collect itself. And, the Three Graces were muses who bestowed beauty and skill upon mortals who could not cultivate such virtues on their own.

An ancient Hindu story tells of two beggars. One asked for food, bestowing the Lord Shri Rama’s grace on the giver in return; the other asked for handouts in the name of the grace of their King Sundaravandan. The king calls the beggars to his court to propose a test to determine whose grace is greater, his own, or Lord Shri Rama’s. After the first beggar serendipitously becomes rich as the result of the accidental misfortune of the second – despite the king’s meddling to assist him – even the king must admit, “The king’s grace cannot work without god’s grace, and if Lord Shri Rama’s grace is there, the king’s is not required.” A similar story is told in a Jewish folktale and in the Sunni Muslim tradition.

In Celtic tradition, fairies may bring unbidden joy, healing, or a special skill to your life, but it may disappear if you do not keep your covenant. This seems fair, but I just can’t bring myself to “believe” in fairies.

Perhaps the tradition that speaks most solidly to my theology is found in Theravada Buddhism. Its teachings are about spiritual self-sufficiency, but also allow for a modified form of grace from above. Specifically, Theravada scriptures teach that each individual must come to realize the liberating Truth by her own faculties, but that the realization of that Truth sometimes comes from a beneficent, superior, external source. Grace is not magic – it is a matter of consciousness.

Buddhaghosa, the sixth-century writer whose name means “voice of the Buddha,” asserts that those who open themselves to the spoken Truth are granted “the fruits of stream entry.” The “stream” is the mystic way and its “fruits” are karmic merit and liberation from the ceaseless round of birth, suffering, death, and rebirth. The divine word is not a spell, and the effects depend, not on the power of a supernatural donor, but on the readiness of the mortal recipient. Both a diligent teacher and a receptive mind are required.

Born a prince, Buddha renounced his possessions and took up a life of asceticism. Having learned the inefficiency of both self-indulgence and self-denial, Buddha committed himself to “The Middle Way,” the path of equilibrium that exists between all extremes. The idea of modified grace fits firmly in the teaching of this “Middle Way.” It would be extreme to deny the possibility of grace, just as it would be extreme to leave grace solely in the hands of supernatural agents. The Middle Path neither deprives humanity of mystery nor renders us pawns of supernatural will. It allows for gifts from external forces, but does not leave the individual at the mercy of those sources. Enlightenment occurs from the symbiotic relationship between me and the grace that exists all around, if I open myself to receive it.

On The Middle Path, I found a meeting ground for God’s grace and my Humanist heritage. †

## Sacred Time and Grace

-by Debra Garfinkel, Pastoral Care Minister



It's January. The holidays are behind us. Our cultural framework of time – real time, play time, dream time, hard time, work time, sacred time – provides an opportunity for us to pause. Few of us experience life as slowing down.

However, due to the abundance of social activities like church, caring visits, and the extravagant events which occur during the holidays, in January we can feel as if we've stepped off of the moving sidewalk and suddenly hit the stone pavement. We might feel as if our brain is recalibrating to adjust to a more normal pace.

If you moved through the holidays with deliberation and with pauses in order to be present, thank you. You are a model of peace and tranquility for us all. If you retreated to the quiet and comfort of your home or another place of safety, blessings be upon you. May you dwell in loving compassion. If you danced and twirled and jumped and skated

(figuratively and/or literally) through the season of Peace-on-Earth-Goodwill-toward-All, glory be! May you find a place of rest. For us all, January is an opportunity to breathe in compassion for ourselves and for all sentient beings and for the planet.

So here's a bit of a story to settle us into a sacred space in which to receive that which is freely given with no strings attached – the grace of life itself:

There once was a man. He was a very successful business man. He lived a long time ago. Or, he lives now – take your pick. One day, this very successful business man who has a long time partner and a son and a daughter and a golden retriever named Lucky, hears someone calling his name. Now, he's walking along quickly in a crowd of people. He turns to see who's calling him. That's the last thing he remembers.

Days and nights pass. Weeks pass. Months pass. The man wakes up. He looks around. He notices he is in a bed. He is in a room. There are several people surrounding him. "Where am I?" he asks. "How did I get here?" "Who are you?" Then he pauses. For a long time. He sees kindness in everyone's eyes. It is a beautiful silence. "Who am I?" he asks tentatively. Then he hears, "Who do you want to be?" A feeling of warmth and happiness replaces the man's confusion and anxiety. He realizes that he has been given a most gracious gift: forgiveness and new life.

That's the story. May you receive the gift of sacred time – of your one precious life – that is yours for the claiming. And may this new year reveal possibilities for more joy, more hope, and more love for you, your family, and for this community of all souls. †



*A Fresh Start* by Nancy Burack

# Day Alliance: More than a Luncheon and Speaker

-by Terri Faith

When All Souls began in 1921, the Day Alliance was right behind in its formation – founded even before the Church School. Its members have worked tirelessly to support the church over the years, most recently funding such big-ticket items as a cookstove for the kitchen and, with Evening Alliance, redecoration of the Sonen Library and the Thoreau Lounge. The gracious receptions following memorial services are hosted by the Day Alliance members.

Beginning January 14, Day Alliance will enrich



the lives of its members and guests with a slate of classes from 9:30 – 11:30 am on Day Alliance Thursdays (the second Thursday of the month) through May. The program is open to all. Participants may stay for lunch by making reservations through Day Alliance. Childcare is available by reservation 72 hours in advance. Classes for January include:

**Art** with Jane Newman in room 120 – Bring your beads, broken jewelry, and things we can string together into some thing new.

**Movie** in the Twilight Zone Cinema – *Calendar Girls*

**Yoga** with Lucy Weberling in the President's Room – Gentle Yoga from 9:30-10:15 and Chair Yoga from 10:30-11:15 am

**Book Club** in Thoreau Lounge – Participants should come prepared to choose a book.

**Social Service** – Project to be announced. It will be a hands-on effort to help others.

The new program is designed to support the purpose of Day Alliance, to bring its members into closer fellowship and cooperation through monthly luncheon meetings with programs of current interest, in addition to denominational work and service to the church and community.

Membership is open to all members and friends of All Souls by payment of annual dues of \$10, according to the by-laws. Dues may be paid at the meeting or mailed to the treasurer. We hope you'll join us!



For more information, contact Su Waner at 838-7194.

**JANUARY 1**

Grace is not a strange, magic substance which is subtly filtered into our souls to act as a spiritual penicillin. Grace is unity, oneness within ourselves, oneness with God. ~ Thomas Merton

**JANUARY 2**

All the natural movements of the soul are controlled by laws analogous to those of physical gravity. Grace is the only exception. ~ Simone Weil

**JANUARY 3**

Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. It strikes us when we feel that our separation is deeper than usual, because we have violated another life, a life which we loved, or from which we were estranged. ~ Paul Tillich & Thomas Moore

**JANUARY 4**

The winds of grace are always blowing; it is for us to raise our sails. ~ Ramakrishna

**JANUARY 5**

God's grace is the beginning, the middle, and the end. When you pray for God's grace, you are like someone standing neck-deep in water and yet crying for water. ~ Ramana Maharishi

**JANUARY 6**

Grace is found in both intense peace and activity... Something inside of us releases, lets go, and says yes in its belonging to the Mystery. ~ Joel Levey & Michelle Levey

**JANUARY 7**

Grace is something good that comes into our lives unexpectedly and we know that we do not deserve it. When grace comes, even in little things, all life suddenly becomes better... to be in the presence of someone with grace is to become more gracious yourself. ~ John Coburn

**JANUARY 8**

Sin may flourish and grace abound where they have not yet been suspected. ~ Judith Plaskow

**JANUARY 9**

Grace is something you can never get but only be given. There's no way to earn it or deserve it or bring it about any more than you can deserve the taste of raspberries and cream or earn good looks or bring about your own birth. ~ Frederick Buechner

**JANUARY 10**

Grace is what happens when openness to chance yields a deeper awareness of the cosmos or one's place in it - when luck leads to spiritual insight... Proust called chance experiences 'earthly experiences of grace.' ~ Jackson Lears

**JANUARY 11**

Heaven isn't 70 and hell, 69.9. With God, the passing grade is zero and to pass is a sheer gift. ~ Peter Kreeft

**JANUARY 12**

Grace is remembering, in the moment, that you are alive. ~ Barbara Shipka

**JANUARY 13**

All is waiting and all is work; all is change and all is permanence. All is grace. ~ Barbara Grizzuti Harrison

**JANUARY 14**

If I am not, may it please God to bring me into it; if I am, may He preserve me in it. ~ Joan of Arc, responding to a trick question about whether she believed herself in a state of grace.

**JANUARY 15**

I do not at all understand the mystery of grace - only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us. ~ Anne Lamott

**JANUARY 16**

And even in our sleep, pain that cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, and in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom to us by the awful grace of God. ~ Aeschylus

**JANUARY 17**

I am overwhelmed by the grace and persistence of my people. ~ Maya Angelou

**JANUARY 18**

The ideal man bears the accidents of life with dignity and grace, making the best of circumstances. ~ Aristotle

**JANUARY 19**

Any artist should be grateful for a naive grace which puts him beyond the need to reason elaborately. ~ Saul Bellow

**JANUARY 20**

I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief... For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free. ~ Wendell Berry

**JANUARY 21**

Beauty without grace is the hook without the bait. ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

**JANUARY 22**

Courage is grace under pressure. ~ Ernest Hemmingway

**JANUARY 23**

How can you sing of amazing grace and all God's wonders without using your hands? ~ Mahalia Jackson

**JANUARY 24**

For his heart was in his work, and the heart giveth grace unto every art. ~ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

**JANUARY 25**

God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things which should be changed and the wisdom to distinguish one from the other. ~ Reinhold Niebuhr

**JANUARY 26**

Grace can and does have a history. ~ Karl Rahner

**JANUARY 27**

Everything that slows us down and forces patience, everything that sets us back into the slow circles of nature, is a help. Gardening is an instrument of grace. ~ May Sarton

**JANUARY 28**

Grace is the beauty of form under the influence of freedom. ~ Friedrich Schiller

**JANUARY 29**

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found. Was blind, but now I see. ~ John Newton

**JANUARY 30**

That is the mystery of grace: it never comes too late. ~ Francois Mauriac

**JANUARY 31**

The growth of grace is like the polishing of metals. There is first an opaque surface; by and by you see a spark darting out, then a strong light, til it sends back a perfect image of the sun that shines upon it. ~ Edward Payson

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# We've Got Grace

-by Phil Haney



Listen carefully to the words of the benediction at the next All Souls service. You will hear distinct components, including the dismissal and the blessing. The dismissal may be referred to as a sending; the blessing is also known as a grace. The benediction will vary depending upon who's at the pulpit, but you will hear words of grace like "Go and be blessed and be a blessing." Have you wondered what this grace means and confers, and what the congregation receives from it? What is a grace meant to remind us?

Many of us struggle with the concept of a divine dispenser of grace. Would a good God give grace only to some? I think I've got company when I say grace doesn't save lives, score points, avoid life's problems. But I think I hit the mark when I say we Unitarians have grace. We have grace as humans, and it is grace that enables us to better our lives and learn to love others deeply. Grace distinguishes humans as having an unmerited opportunity to live a fuller life. The mere potential to find grace in our lives is a powerful concept... one that can be cultivated through spiritual community, fellowship, and prayer. Yes, it takes effort to find grace, and it takes a community to nurture the gift.

Unitarians are encouraged to prescribe spiritual paths, and to think freely about their personal religion. But we choose to dwell together in a religious house, in fellowship. It is in that chosen setting where our grace waits to be discovered. This is what Paul Tillich referred to as "the gestalt of grace" – the additional sum of the experience of gathering together in holy community. This experience of grace from community is not new; Jesus said, "Where two or more of you gather in my name, I will be there in the midst of you." (Matt. 18:20) The practice of community spirit takes grace to its intended level. It is a gift in waiting, and discovering it and using it leads to a richer, fuller life – a life lived with grace is blessed, and is a blessing.

So is grace the gift of our creator, or is it *fellowship* that is the substance of grace? Each of us must find our grace, and send the gift of grace into the community. My explanation of a Unitarian's grace is that as highly evolved, sentient humans, we are possessed of greater potential together than alone. This is the way it was meant to be. Each of us is equipped – gifted – to add value to life, and especially to the lives of others, in community, in fellowship. This added value of human fellowship is grace. At our worship services we are reminded of our gift of grace, and what to do with it. †

*Go in peace.*

*May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born to you of gratitude and of hope.*

*May you use those gifts that you have received and pass on the love that has been given to you.*

*May you be contented knowing that you indeed, are a child of God.*

*May this presence settle into your bones and allow your soul the freedom to sing and dance and praise and love.*

*Go and be blessed and be a blessing,*

*Amen.*

*~Adapted from St. Therese de Liseaux.*

# To Feel Amazing Grace

-by Randy Lewis, Student Minister



In December 2005, I was selected to give the impact statement at the trial of the young man who took my brother's life. It was six months after Ladaryle's tragic death, and my entire family was still emotionally raw from the loss. As I be-

gan to tell the young man of what his actions had caused I said, "I am not able to forgive you for taking my brother's life, for it is not in my power to do so, only Ladaryle himself and the Divine Source can release you from taking his life. I can only forgive you for the pain that you have caused me, and I forgive you."

Ladaryle was not particularly religious. Being gay caused him to be alienated and ridiculed. People would often take advantage of and abuse his kindness and vulnerabilities. Soon after his death, my family and I discovered in his Bible a bookmark with an inscription written in his own broken handwriting, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

After that I was able to offer the young man on trial some consolation. I told him that I was certain my brother had him in mind when he wrote those words. And it was at that moment that I felt a perfect grace. I told the young man that my family and I wished him no harm. I realized that hurting someone often hurts others. The amazing grace

that I experienced that day was forgiveness.

Grace is, in part, a remarkable ability to look beyond grief, pain, and anger to experience an extraordinary peace that truly surpasses understanding. It is grace that keeps one at rest in the middle of a storm. It is grace that allows one who has experienced a great loss to utter, as Horatio Spafford wrote in his famous hymn, "It is well, it is well with my soul." †



# Grace – Personified

-by Kate Starr, Youth Director, & Rev. Tamara Lebak, Associate Minister

“I was an addict for a very long time.  
My life had no value or meaning,  
so I decided to end it.  
I took enough drugs to make me sleep forever.  
Then this person, this angel, found me and  
carried me to the hospital.  
When I woke up,  
I made a decision to take a different path,  
and the way suddenly became so clear to me.  
It was like everything up until now  
was part of some grand plan.  
I’m sober now,  
and helping others in their recovery.  
I don’t deserve it,  
but I’ve been given another chance.”



“I had been out of work  
for months.  
The economy is so bad,  
and I am not good  
at job interviews.  
My family was only days  
away from eviction,  
and we had  
nowhere else to go.  
I was on my way  
to another job interview  
when a person yelled,  
‘Hey, you dropped this’  
and handed me an envelope.  
When I opened it,  
there was \$777.  
That’s the exact amount  
of my mortgage payment.  
I guess 7 is my lucky num-  
ber,  
because I also got the job.  
It’s a miracle.”



❖  
“I am a single mother,  
and during my whole pregnancy  
I was so afraid something would be wrong  
with my baby.  
I’ve always been told I’m worthless,  
but the worst part is, I believed it.  
I try so hard, but I fail so much.  
Anyway, I was on the subway one night.  
My head was laid back, my eyes were closed,  
and I was praying.  
Maybe I fell asleep or something,  
because someone put their hands  
on the sides of my face,  
kissed the top of my head, and said,  
‘Everything is going to be alright.’

I had my baby that night,  
and as you can see,  
he’s just perfect.”



Grace smiled,  
and turned off the  
interview  
with three  
random people,  
recipients of a gift  
from some  
unknown donor.  
Grace said a short prayer  
before a quick meal.  
Then, she donned her shim-  
mering cloak and veil,  
and vanished into the cold,  
dark night  
to bless even more of the  
undeserving,  
unlucky,  
and unworthy. †

# Spiritual Practice: Set Aside Time for Amazing Grace

-by Rev. Debra Garfinkel, Pastoral Care Minister



There are stories in many traditions about a son among sons who, despite having a loving and giving father, chooses to leave home early. He leaves home to live the way he wants to, without rules and without having to

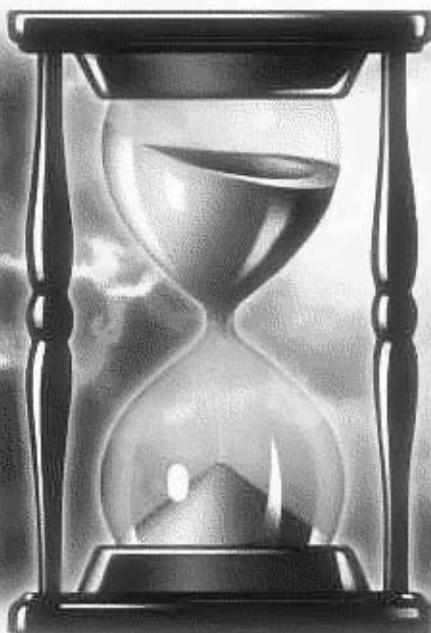
do the work that he feels has been unfairly imposed upon him. Everything is fine until he runs out of money. Then, he discovers that there are rules and laws that must be obeyed; if he doesn't obey them, he suffers serious consequences. Now, depending upon the culture, the story varies in details but the results are the same. The son falls deeper and deeper into poverty and despair. He discovers that he has no friends, no one upon whom he can count, and no safe place in which to rest. One day, he wakes up. He decides to return to his father's house and beg for a job and a place to sleep.

This concept is so often repeated as a theme in plays, movies, and song that all you need to say is "prodigal" and most people remember the main idea: the wandering son who has wasted his inheritance and squandered his privilege is welcomed home and treated as if he were royalty. Where is the fairness in this? It certainly isn't deserved. The son receives amazing grace.

For spiritual practice this month, I invite you to set aside 15 minutes (at least) each day to sit in a quiet spot. It doesn't have to be at the same time or in the same spot each day. The important thing is that it is time set aside with

no interruptions (cats, dogs, kids, parents, texting, tasks... you get the idea.) As you sit, imagine the story of a prodigal child.

As you imagine the story, picture it as a movie in your mind. Be there. What does it look like where you are? What aromas/odors come to mind? How do you feel (cold, hot, relaxed, uncomfortable...)? Who are you in this scenario? Don't force things. Allow the movie scene to play out. Notice what happens.



When you reach the end of your time (you could set a timer or something), jot down some notes so you can remember what you experienced. Then, set them aside and go about your day. If you are moved to do so, you can return to your notes at the end of your day. Be gentle with yourself. There is no one "right" or "correct" way to engage in this exercise. Just try to be as present as possible with the idea of this story. Notice if you experience resistance. Allow yourself to explore the resistance. Perhaps sitting quietly with no interruptions is the very grace that you need. Notice what happens, even if you think nothing happens. Notice.

May you be blessed with the story that you most need to take into your heart and soul. May you experience the love that asks only that you be who you truly are. And may the grace and forgiveness of this love move in you and through you to bring about spiritual freedom – helping to release the justice that rolls down like waters and creates peace like an ever flowing spring. †

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# MARCH in the MLK PARADE

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March with the All Souls Youth Department and others, in the Annual Martin Luther King Day Parade as *One Church, with Many Expressions!*

Look for the DECORATED All Souls Bus on North Cincinnati near Seminole Place.

Our bus will be a work of art this year, with the 4X11 mural below (in full color) attached to either side. The mural is under construction now, with the hard work of our 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th graders and youth.



Original drawing by Laurel Williamson

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## Monday Jan. 18, 10:00am

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For more information, contact Kate Starr at 743-3194

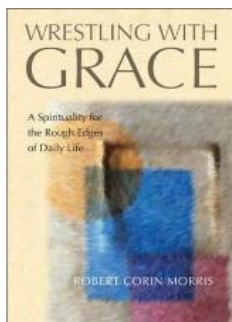


### Martin Luther King Sunday Guest Speaker, Rev. Belva Brown Jordan

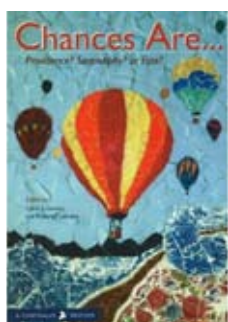
Join us on Sunday, **January 17** as we hear from Rev. Belva Brown Jordan, Associate Dean of Admissions and Student Services at Philips Theological Seminary. Ms. Jordan's teaching and research interests are in womanist theological perspectives, theomusicology, Negro Spirituals, and the praxis of ministry. She holds a Master of Divinity from Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, TX, and her publications include the study guide to *Setting the Table: Women in Theological Conversation*, ed. Rita Nakashima Brock, et.al.

(St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1995) and the essay, "The Lord's Supper," co-authored with Stephanie A. Paulsell in *Chalice Introduction to Disciples Theology*, ed. Peter G. Heltzel (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008).

## Resources for Further Reading



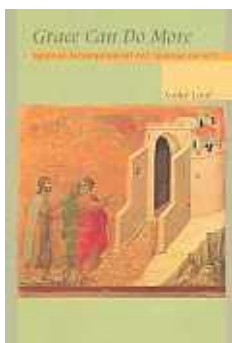
***Wrestling with Grace: A Spirituality for the Rough Edges of Daily Life*** by Robert Corin Morris  
A very helpful volume filled with concrete spiritual practices that can be done in the midst of everyday pressures and routines. The author's familiarity with Buddhist mind training and Jewish ritual makes this an outstanding resource for those who want to develop a more flexible and diverse set of spiritual practices.



***Chances Are: Providence? Serendipity? or Fate?***  
edited by Carol S. Lawson and Robert F. Lawson  
What role does chance or fate play in humankind's spiritual growth? Through this collection of essays, short stories, poetry, and art, the possibilities of chance and divine providence are sent into a swirling dance of ordinary and extraordinary circumstances.



***The Haunt of Grace***  
by Ted Loder  
From the author of *My Heart in My Mouth* and *Guerillas of Grace*, comes a book of provocative insight into the mysteries of the "sneaky" ways God surfaces in the muddle of everyday life.



***Grace Can Do More: Spiritual Accompaniment and Spiritual Growth*** by Andre Louf  
Attuning ourselves to God's grace and responding to it in body, mind, and soul is the work of a lifetime. Allowing our real self to emerge means accepting and working to overcome weakness and failings, and experiencing grace in prayer and reading, in solitude and companionship, in joyous times and times of trial.

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**When submitting articles for church publications:**  
1) Submit your text electronically via email. Plain text is best.  
2) Include your name and daytime number.  
3) Not all submissions will be published. Submissions may be edited.

Questions? Call Laurel Williamson at 743-2805, ext 305.

## January Highlights

Jan. 1	HAPPY NEW YEAR!
Jan. 4-8	Directory Photos
Jan. 8	Soulful Sundown: "Going to Graceland"
Jan. 9	Coffeehouse: Fulks & Gjersoe
Jan. 10	Program & Activity Fair All Souls 101
Jan. 13	Wednesday Connections Resumes
Jan. 14	Day Alliance
Jan. 15	Parents' Night Out Evening of Praise
Jan. 18	Martin Luther King Day Parade
Jan. 22	Trivia Night
Jan. 24	Branches Extravaganzas
Jan. 26	Evening Alliance
Jan. 29	Coffeehouse: Eliza Gilkyson


See inside for

# Parish Notes

*The All Souls Weekly Bulletin*



## ALL SOULS ALTERNATIVE WORSHIP



*Going to Graceland*

**FRIDAY, JAN. 8**  
**7:00 PM**

FEATURING  
**JARED TYLER & TAMARA LEBAK**

CHILD CARE AVAILABLE: CONTACT CATHY WOLF: 743-2805 EXT 308

The poster features a background image of a brick wall with a large, ornate metal sculpture of an open book. Two black and white photographs are set within the pages of the book sculpture: one of a man playing a guitar and another of a woman playing a guitar. The text is overlaid on the top and bottom of the image.