

Amazing Grace

La Sierra University Church of Seventh-day Adventists • Riverside, California • August 2009

Preparing

As the service begins with the organ prelude, we reflect on this story Philip Yancey heard from a friend and included in his book *What's So Amazing About Grace*:

A prostitute came to me in wretched straits, homeless, sick, unable to buy food for her two-year-old daughter. Through sobs and tears, she told me she had been renting out her daughter – two years old! – to men interested in kinky sex. She made more renting out her daughter for an hour than she could earn on her own in a night. She had to do it, she said, to support her own drug habit. I could hardly bear hearing her sordid story. For one thing, it made me legally liable – I'm required to report cases of child abuse. I had no idea what to say to this woman.

At last I asked if she had ever thought of going to a church for help. I will never forget the look of pure, naïve shock that crossed her face. "Church!" she cried. "Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They'd just make me feel worse."

Inviting

After the prelude, the pastoral host says:

Grace comes from outside,
as a gift and not an achievement.
For God's thoughts are not our thoughts,
and God's ways are not our ways.
As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are God's ways higher than our ways,
and God's thoughts than our thoughts.

We join in reading the bold type.

Knowing this, we have come to worship.

*The pastor expresses our shared concerns,
and then says:*

As we worship,
God reveals to us the presence of Christ's spirit
and draws us into divine grace.

Amen.

*Where possible we stand and join in singing
these words to the tune of hymn 8 (Kremser):*

**We gather together to ask for God's blessing,
to live in community, seeking God's will.
We come now, as sisters and brothers, confessing
the sins that divide and the wrong in us still.**

**Beside us, forgiving, enabling, sustaining,
you call us, O Savior, to life that is new.
You draw us away from self-centered
complaining,
you lead us and guide us in ways that are true.**

We remain standing as the pastor leads us in prayer:

Holy God, we come before you with awe,
for you are great in grace and goodness.

Some of us come with reluctance and some with
joy, some with sadness and others with fear.

Yet we know you receive us as we are.

We have come with a longing for grace.

**Your grace is the glue
that mends our broken lives.**

The worse we feel about ourselves,

the more we need your grace as our refuge.

Give us, we pray, a sense that you accept us,
own us, hold us, affirm us,
and will never let us go—

**even when you are not much impressed
with what you have on your hands.**

Touch us with the energizing fire of your grace.

Speak to us through your Word.

We long to become a nourishing culture of grace.

**Send us into the world renewed, enlightened
eager and able to be messengers of your grace.**

Amen.

*We sit, and after a few moments of silence
the service leader says:*

Grace comes free of charge
to people who do not deserve it,

And we are some of those people.

Grace that comes with no strings attached
seems to go against everything we know.

But Jesus dared to make grace unconditional.

Like a visitor from a foreign country
who notices what the natives overlook,

Jesus saw grace everywhere.

Jesus did not give his parables first of all
to teach us how to live,

**but to teach us how God loves,
wanting above all else to forgive.**

Grace is not about finishing first or last;
it is about not counting.

Grace dispenses gifts, not wages.

Grace costs nothing for the recipients,
but everything for the Giver.

**Grace means there is nothing we can do
to make God love us more —**

no amount of spiritual calisthenics and discipline,
no amount of knowledge
gained from sermons and Bible classes,
no amount of crusading on behalf of good causes.

**And grace means there is nothing we can do
to make God love us less —**

no amount of racism or pride or greed
or sexual misconduct or dishonest dealings.

**Grace means that God already loves us
as much as an infinite God can possibly love.**

Praying

The service leader leads us in prayer.

God of all grace,
we long for peace within and around us.

**We long for the day when our homes
will be dwelling places for your grace.**

And we confess that we are often stressed
and selfish.

**We do not trust each other;
we harbor resentments.**

We have not been willing to take the risks
and make the hard choices that love requires.

**Because we know that grace is what you are,
we pray that you will look upon us**

with kindness.

Show us how to walk in your paths of grace
in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

*A cantor sings the following two stanzas
to the tune of hymn 659 (Stuttgart):*

There's a wideness in God's mercy
like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in God's justice
that is more than liberty.

There's no place where earthly sorrows
are more felt than in God's heav'n.
There's no place where earthly failings
have such kindly judgment giv'n.

We join in singing a third stanza:

**For the love of God is broader
than the measure of our mind,
And the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.**

*The service leader reminds the congregation
of special blessings and special needs.
and then says:*

I invite you to kneel
and join in the prayer Jesus taught his disciples:

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come and your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial,

and deliver us from the evil one.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory

are yours now and forever.

Amen.

God of creative love, in your grace and goodness
you give us life, forgiveness, and hope.

Now we pray for your world.

Raise the world you love above the pride and
distrust

that separate nations and races and classes.

Amen.

Let us each pray for understanding and peace.

We pray silently.

Lead and inspire us to help and bless others,
so the circle of grace may be complete.

Amen.

Let us each pray for insightful, creative love.

We pray silently.

Bring comfort and healing, we pray,
and remind your hurting daughters and sons
how much they are loved.

Amen.

Let us each pray for someone with a special need.

We pray silently.

O God, whose love we trust
and whose Spirit enables us to pray,
hear our prayers and answer them
in ways that fulfill your own gracious purposes.

Amen.

We sit.

Listening

The service leader says:

Through prophets and apostles
we hear human words that convey God's Word.
Let us clear our minds of distractions
and attend to our readings from Scripture.

Amen.

The first reader says:

I invite you to listen for the word of God
in the words of _____,
chapter ____, verses __ to __.

We are listening.

After the reading:

This ends the reading.

Thanks be to God for these words!

After a period of silent reflection, the pastor says:

I invite you to join me in reading responsively
From Psalm ____, on the sheet you received
with your printed liturgy.

*After a period of silent reflection on the reading,
the cantor sings these words
to the tune of hymn 155 (Rockingham Old):*

Teach us to know your holy way,
and give us an obedient mind,
that in your service we may find
our heart's delight from day to day.

The second reader says:

Listen for the word of God in the letter to
the Christians in the city of Ephesus,

chapter ____, verses ____ to ____.

We are listening.

After the reading:

This ends the reading.

Thanks be to God for these words!

*After a period of silent reflection,
we join in singing a second stanza
to the tune of hymn 155:*

**Help us, O Savior, here to trace
the sacred footsteps you have trod,
and, fully trusting in our God,
to grow in goodness, truth, and grace.**

The service leader says:

I invite you to stand to hear the Gospel.

Listen to the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to
_____, chapter ___, verses ___ to ___.

We are listening.

After the reading, the service leader says:

The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Thanks be to God for the gospel!

We sit and reflect silently on the Gospel.

Singing

The service leader says:

Because your grace, O God, abounds to us,
we too want to abound in gracious deeds.

We recognize our calling
to share your goodness with others.

**So we bring our love, our trust, our worship,
and these our other gifts.**

Singing

After the offering is received, the cantor says:

I invite you to stand and join in singing
hymn _____.

After the hymn, we remain standing.

Considering

The homilist prays:

By your Spirit, O God,
teach us what we need to know
so that every day we can live
in the knowledge of your grace.

Amen.

*We sit and listen as the homilist expounds
one or more of the scripture readings.*

Affirming

*After a period of silent reflection on the homily,
the service leader says:*

I invite you to stand
and join in our affirmation of faith.

You, O God, are supreme and holy love,
creating our world and giving us life.

Your purpose overarches everything we do.

You have always been with us.

You are our gracious God.

You, O God, come to us before we come to you.

**You have shown your love for us in Jesus Christ,
who lived and died and rose again.**

You are with us now.

You are our faithful God.

You, O God, are Holy Spirit, empowering us
to be your gospel in the world.

You reconcile and heal.

You overcome death.

You are our triumphant God

We worship you with all we have and are.
Amen.

*We remain standing and join in singing
these words to the tune of hymn 108:*

**“Amazing grace” – how sweet the sound –
that saves someone like me!**

**I once was lost, but now I’m found,
was blind, but now I see!**

Please remain standing

Reflecting

The pastor says:

God gave up his own Son
rather than give up on us.
God will reconcile, God will forgive,
no matter what obstacles we put in the way.

Thanks be to God!

*After the organ chimes, we sit
for silent prayer and meditation during the postlude.*

Blessing

After the postlude the pastor says:

In God’s amazing grace
may the coming week be enfolded in love
and filled with joy.

Alleluia! Amen.

Scripture Readings for August and September

August 1	2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a	<i>Psalm 51:1-12</i>	Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16	John 6:24-35
August 8	2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33	<i>Psalm 130</i>	Ephesians 4:25-5:2	John 6:35, 41-51
August 15	1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14	<i>Psalm 111</i>	Ephesians 5:15-20	John 6:51-58
August 22	1 Kings 8:22-30, 41-43	<i>Psalm 95</i>	Ephesians 6:10-20	John 6:56-59
August 29	Song of Solomon 2:8-13	<i>Psalm 45:1-2, 6-9</i>	James 1:17-27	Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23
September 5	Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23	<i>Psalm 125</i>	James 2:1-10	Mark 7:24-37
September 12	Proverbs 1:20-33	<i>Psalm 19</i>	James 3:1-12	Mark 8:27-38
September 19	Proverbs 31:10-31	<i>Psalm 1</i>	James 3:13l-3:3, 7-8a	Mark 9:30-37
September 26	Esther 7:1-10	<i>Psalm 124</i>	James 5:13-20	Mark 8:38-50

Acknowledgements

In addition to various ancient and contemporary resources, this liturgy draws on the content and language of the book What’s So Amazing About Grace? by Philip Yancey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997). The hymns are adapted from The New Century Hymnal (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1995).
