

“Grateful Community”
Jeremiah 18:1-4 & Philemon 1:3-7
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In 1922, James Weldon Johnson wrote *The Creation*. “And God stepped out on space, And God looked around and said: I'm lonely—I'll make me a world. And far as the eye of God could see Darkness covered everything, Blacker than a hundred midnights down in a cypress swamp. Then God smiled, And the light broke, And the darkness rolled up on one side, And the light stood shining on the other, And God said: That's good! Then God reached out and took the light in his hands, And God rolled the light around in his hands Until God made the sun; And God set that sun a-blazing in the heavens. And the light that was left from making the sun God gathered it up in a shining ball And flung it against the darkness, Spangling the night with the moon and stars. Then down between The darkness and the light God hurled the world; And God said: That's good! Then God himself stepped down—And the sun was on God's right hand, And the moon was on God's left; The stars were clustered about God's head, And the earth was under God's feet. And God walked, and where God trod God's footsteps hollowed the valleys out And bulged the mountains up. Then God stopped and looked and saw That the earth was hot and barren. So God stepped over to the edge of the world And God spat out the seven seas—God batted his eyes, and the lightnings flashed—God clapped his hands, and the thunders rolled—And the waters above the earth came down, The cooling waters came down. Then the green grass sprouted, And the little red flowers blossomed, The pine tree pointed his finger to the sky, And the oak spread out his arms, The lakes cuddled down in the hollows of the ground, And the rivers ran down to the sea; And God smiled again, And the rainbow appeared, And curled itself around God's shoulder. Then God raised his arm and God waved his hand Over the sea and over the land, And God said: Bring forth! Bring forth! And quicker than God could drop his hand, Fishes and fowls And beasts and birds Swam the rivers and the seas, Roamed the forests and the woods, And split the air with their wings. And God said: That's good! Then God walked around, And God looked around On all that God had made. God looked at the sun, And God looked at the moon, And God looked at the little stars; God looked on the world With all its living things, And God said: I'm lonely still. Then God sat down—On the side of a hill where God could think; By a deep, wide river God sat down; With God's head in his hands, God thought and thought, Till God thought: I'll make me a man! Up from the bed of the river God scooped the clay; And by the bank of the river God kneeled him down; And there the great God Almighty Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky, Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night, Who rounded the earth in the middle of his hand; This great God, Like a mammy bending over her baby, Kneeled down in the dust Toiling over a lump of clay Till God shaped it in God's own image; Then into it God blew the breath of life, And man became a living soul. Amen.”

All people are God's beloved children. God's smile fills us and the cosmos with light. God created people and the cosmos good and with infinite potential. Even when humankind turned from God, God did not turn from us. Each one of us is still made in God's image and likeness. God continually pours love into us. Above all else God desires to connect with us. We are immersed and empowered by God's loving presence. Take a deep breath—it's God's energy filling you with life and sending you forth in beauty. God is with us helping us plunge our own hands into the clay, to participate in the ongoing crafting of creation. God will create forever. God loves through us to expand develop and transform.

Imperfections, suffering and brokenness emerged. **Jeremiah 18:1-4 NRSV** “**The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: “Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words.” So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.**”

Potter Ashley Warner said. “Paint stays where you put it, but clay talks back.” Sometimes the clay doesn't do what the potter wants it to do. As a vessel is being formed it often has defects that the potter smooths and reforms. Clay talks back. We often “talk back” to our God. God is eager to engage with us. God never throws us out. God covers our mistakes. God reforms our suffering. God mends our brokenness. God reforms are imperfections into grandeur. God kneels down again and again, toiling over our lump of clay until we can once again accept God's breath of life. Clay constantly changes—bulging, shrinking, turning dizzily until something of beauty appears. Each of us is in God's hands becoming renewed creations. God also empowers us to mold each other, to celebrate each person's goodness, to forgive every flaw, to polish every gift. Often, we are called to disperse the darkness with the brilliance of our smile, to fill the emptiness with our loving presence and to heal by breathing God's life into broken shards of clay.

We are rejuvenated by prayer and grateful community. The Apostle Paul writes. **Philemon 1:3-7 NLT “May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. I always thank my God when I pray for you, Philemon, because I keep hearing about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God’s people. And I am praying that you will put into action the generosity that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ. Your love has given me much joy and comfort, my brother, for your kindness has often refreshed the hearts of God’s people.”**

May God give you grace and peace. Embrace and celebrate grace. You are forgiven. Let go of guilt, “what ifs” and “if onlys”. God forgives you. God is partnering with you to reform you into the person you desire to be. Welcome peace into every fiber of your being. Let the peace displace worry, fear, anxiety, to dos. Let peace envelope you.

Here is the Bible I received when I was in first grade. It has some green paint on it from VBS. I was not able to read this Bible for several years until I learned how to process my dyslexia. It has eight pictures. I received grace and peace through two of these pictures. The first shows a tree, farm fields and a mountain all things that refresh and rejuvenate me. The second shows a lake. When I felt broken, I went to the lake on our farm and sat on the spillway. When I felt joy, I went to the lake to swim. I regularly look at trees, fields, mountains and lakes for God breathes life into me through them. Often, I pray by imagining I am talking with Jesus by a fire, beside a mountain lake. In this minute of silence picture something that fills you with grace and peace. I realize sharing for some you, disperses your grace and peace. If that is you then close your eyes. For the rest of you find someone who has their eyes open. Be brave, move around. Maybe find someone you do not know very well. Each of you will have a minute to share something that fills you with grace and peace. Spend one more minute sharing or imagining grace and peace. Amen. Make time to regularly enjoy that which fills you with grace and peace.

The Apostle Paul prayed. I always thank my God when I pray for you, Philemon. Then Paul explains specific ways he is thankful and grateful. I keep hearing about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God’s people. And I am praying that you will put into action the generosity that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ. Your love has given me much joy and comfort, my brother, for your kindness has often refreshed the hearts of God’s people.

I am thankful for my Sunday School teacher Bruno. I laughed as he would gather us by saying, “Gather round and settle down you ramble rousing whipper snappers.” Bruno listened to me and celebrated the goodness in my life. Bruno filled me with a sense of belonging. Bruno encourage me to dream big and follow my dreams. Bruno help me realize that God is my friend, eraser of mistakes, failures and pains and biggest fan. In this silence think of a person that you are thankful for. Savor specific ways are you thankful for them. God’s Holy Spirit is connecting you to them wherever they may be on earth or in heaven. Let God’s Holy Spirit connect you right now. If you want to spend more time alone then shut your eyes, otherwise spend the next two minutes sharing about the person who fills you with thanksgiving. One minute remaining. Regularly make time to give thanks for someone.

God is loving us into a grace filled, peaceful, grateful community who will transform the cosmos into eternal joy, love and glory. Amen