

“Grace Transformation”

Romans 12 1-21 Matthew 16 13-19 Galatians 5 22-23

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Prayer for Understanding Everpresent God, open our hearts to your healing word, our minds to your informing word and our souls to your renewing word. Amen.

At Marty's funeral, a celebration of her life and resurrection to Life Triumphant, Marty's son spoke these words from Galatians. **Galatians 5:22-23 NRSV** “**The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.**” Then he prayed. “I thank you Lord Jesus for the fruitful life of my dear mother. She had the unfading beauty of a quiet and gentle spirit.”

Grace transforms us, filling us with gratitude, inspiring us to share the fruit of the Spirit. In the letter to the Romans for eleven chapters the Apostle Paul describes God's radical grace. Wherever sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. Grace is astounding good news. In chapter twelve, Paul shifts to our response to grace. Paul describes how we are to live in gratitude for God's forgiving, healing, mending, perfecting, glorifying, amazing grace. Paul begins with “therefore”, everything in the letter has been leading to this point. As Walter Brueggemann has said, "Whenever you see a 'therefore' in the Bible, you'd better duck."

Romans 12:1-21 “**I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the grace of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Do not think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other. In God's grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly. Do not just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Do not curse them; pray that God will bless them. Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other. Do not be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And do not think you know it all! Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, “I will take revenge; I will pay them back,” says the Lord. Instead, “If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.” Do not let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.**”

Experiencing grace, savoring grace, transforms us. Grace fills us with joy, gratitude, peace, and love. Grace enables us to let go, forgive, and let come. Grace nurtures our gifts. Grace unites us in harmony. Paul addresses us in the plural, all of us, the entire world, will be transformed by grace. The radical transformation grace provides is from a world with divisions to a world where everyone is equal, no one thinks they are better than anyone else, everyone shares their gifts, everyone honors each other, everyone helps each other, everyone provides gracious hospitality for all in need. By God's grace alone, no efforts of our own, no beliefs, no actions, no affiliations, instead solely by the free gift of God's adopting love, we all belong to God's eternal family and are siblings with everyone around the world. Therefore, we will be transformed from our current state, a world with divisions, to a world of equality and harmony.

The Apostle Paul was writing in a time when insiders and outsiders abounded. Jesus often confronted the religious leaders on their divisive ways, sorting, categorizing, judging,—clean and unclean, righteous, and heretic, Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free. It was a world shaped by hierarchies, with a few people on top and most on the bottom, some honored and most shamed. Paul challenges all of us to stop our divisiveness, to leave the current world behind, to view all people as God's beloved. We are becoming one body with many gifts.

We are encouraged to describe ourselves, and others, in terms of their identity and giftedness. If someone asks you, "who are you" or "tell me about yourself". Your answer might be I am a beloved child of God gifted with compassion.

Which of the following gifts has God given you? **Galatians 5:22-23 MSG "God brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely."** Which of these fruits of the Spirit has God given you: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control? Think about your family and friends what gifts has God given them. I challenge you today to talk, call or write to three of them affirming a gift you see in them. If you are up for a super transformation contact someone you dislike, despise, or consider your enemy and affirm a gift you see in them.

Imagine how our world will be different when everyone sees in each other as gifted siblings, rather than through society's categories of rich and poor, honor and shame, insider, and outsider. By grace we will live as equals, one body, each of us sharing gifts.

There is pottery called the "Circle of Friends". It consists of a group of people standing in a circle with their arms around each other. In the center is a candle. It is a striking image. When you light the candle, turn off the lights and look at the ceiling, the "Circle of Friends" is transformed into something fantastic. For as the candle flickers, those figures all dance together upon the ceiling, moving in wonderful harmony. That pottery is an image of how God's grace will transform all of us. The candlelight is God's grace shining upon us, causing our unique gifts to dance. We rejoice together in the light of grace appreciating each other's giftedness.

The gospel of Matthew explains how Jesus is grace in human flesh. Experiencing God's grace transforms who we are. **Matthew 16:13-19a "When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" "Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets." Then Jesus asked them, "But who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because God in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of death will not conquer it. And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven."**

Peter says Jesus is "Messiah" meaning Jesus is our deliver and savior, Jesus is a bearer of grace who transforms us. Peter says Jesus is "the Son of the living God". Jesus you are the life source of the cosmos, who sustains all, who is transforming all, therefore Jesus is our sibling who unites us all together in the familial bound of love.

Jesus responds by telling Peter who he is. Peter is a sibling who bears the image of God, who is gifted by God, who is able to love and rejoice. Upon Peter, the rock, the church, is being built. We are living stones cemented to each other, connected to one another, supporting each other. All the powers of death will not conquer the grace of God that unites us for eternity. The powers of death try to divide and separate. Grace resurrects to eternal life. The Holy Spirit unites us with those who are resurrected. The powers of death damage relationships, leading us to fight, tear down, destroy, spend our energy on hate and be at war with each other. Today we struggle with the powers of death. Ultimately God's grace will mend every relationship and unite us all. We will become a loving family. God has given us the key to heaven, grace. We all have the keys of grace and love. Each of us also has additional keys, gifts, abilities, talents, creativity, that enhance life, that add goodness, wonder and majesty to the cosmos. Nurture your keys. Share your keys. One day we will all celebrate your keys, my keys, everyone's keys, for eternity. God is building, expanding, the love of the cosmos, through your goodness. Imagine how God is expanding love through your wonders. Imagine how God is expanding love through other people's wonders. Welcome grace who is transforming everyone into a harmonious family. Amen

