



Dan Nolta

When I last wrote for you, I announced my 70th birthday would be done by the time you had read the devotionals. This year I am pleased to announce: By the time you read this Judi and I will have celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary surrounded by our six kids and their families, including nine grandkids. We had hoped that by now our number would have swelled by five adopted grandkids from Africa, but we are still waiting.

Forty-one of our years together have been spent in Tacoma, Washington where we came to pastor Olympic View Friends Church, and where I am now concluding almost a year of being interim pastor.

We will celebrate our anniversary with a return trip to Kenya with some of our family and then on to South Africa to visit some retired police chaplain friends.

Our years together have been busy and blessed with opportunities to raise our kids as well as to serve in both pastoral ministry and chaplaincy. They have indeed been years blessed with God's amazing grace. How could they have been better?

BIBLE READING: Galatians 1:11-24

Like every writer, and certainly every pastor, I sometimes struggle to know what it is I am supposed to preach or to write. Thus I found myself while on a trip to California. While wending our way home, taking a day here and there to visit relatives, Judi and I arrived at the home of one of my “other mothers” for an uncharacteristically short visit...and the Lord made it plain.

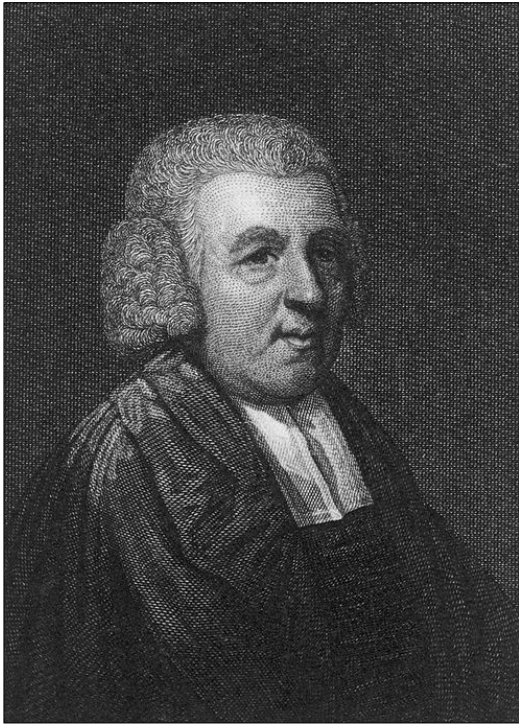
This lovely “other mother” has been diagnosed with stage 4 cancer, with all of its fears, surgeries, treatments, and life adjustments. The day we arrived she had been told, “No more treatment.” As she related the doctor’s words she was smiling her wonderful smile and through the tears that were somehow keeping my ears from hearing well, I know I heard the gist of the words she was speaking: “I am ready; I would rather just go.”

There was nothing to do but to return the love and to pray. As I was praying with her and her husband, I found myself thanking God for this living, loving demonstration of his amazing grace. I immediately knew that I was to let the dying glow of her life shine upon the words of that most wonderful of all hymns as penned by John Newton, “Amazing Grace.”

SONG: Amazing Grace

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father thank you for the lives lived out before me that have been living demonstrations of your amazing grace. They have guided and encouraged, chastised and challenged. May I live such a life before others.

—Dan Nolte



John Newton

BIBLE READING: Ephesians 2:1-9

“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.”

“They ought to be locked up.” “Punish them.” “That’s just what they deserve.”

All of us have heard such talk...maybe even said these sorts of things. And we all know it is easier to be the one saying such things than having to hear such things said to—or about—us.

We at times have to be faced with our own moral character (wretched), the evidence of our straying from God’s pathway for us (lost), and the failure to acknowledge God in all parts of our lives (blind). The condition of wretched, lost, and blind is met in our own hearts and minds—and maybe in others’—with recrimination, condemnation, and judgment.

In contrast to words of judgment, harsh punishment, and due process, the knowledge and experience of God’s amazing grace is indeed a sweet sound. Even the word *grace* sounds pleasant to physical as well as spiritual ears. It gently calls us, unconditionally loves us, and encourages us to The Way. Our eyes are opened to the beauty of the truth and our feet are directed down its path.

Punishment is what we deserve. By faith, God’s grace is what we get. Isn’t that amazing?

SONG: Amazing Grace (verse one, as above)

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you Lord for the grace that forgives, directs, and opens our eyes to your truth.

—Dan Nolta

BIBLE READING: Hebrews 4:14-16

“T’was grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.”

“The hour I first believed” was an awesome hour. As a teenager with scant knowledge of this great God of the Universe, I only knew that by grace he loved me and I needed him. I believed, and I have never forgotten that moment: leaving the church and driving in my rattletrap old car singing at the top of my very inadequate voice, “This world is not my home, I’m just a passing through....”

Those early days were so fresh, clean, simple, and uncluttered; and then life began to creep back in and I started to “work out my salvation.” I am still in that process, overshadowed each and every day by the same grace that brought me to salvation.

The closer I get to heaven the more I depend upon grace. You may call it “fire insurance.” You may call it an accounting for the reality of sin. Whatever you call it, or however you characterize it, I find in it a recognition of a needed grace that operates now, and will continue to operate as a needed component in my spiritual life.

SONG: Amazing Grace (verse two, as above)

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord help us to never forget the hour we first believed. Freshen our minds and hearts with the memory.

—Dan Nolta

BIBLE READING: Jeremiah 29:11-13

“The Lord has promised good to me.
His word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be,
As long as life endures.”

Jeremiah’s words—“plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”—were surely in Newton’s mind as he penned this third verse of “Amazing Grace.” They are wonderful words of hope for now and hope for the future.

While some struggle with the discipline of a simple lifestyle, I seem to stumble through, simply seeking to be a good steward of what I have been given. From time to time in my stumbling along I am confronted with the overwhelming feeling that God truly has been good to me, has lavished upon me more than I need. I own a 1989 Chevy Silverado truck; it is all paid for. Even in my (sort of) retirement I have food on my table every day. I can frequently give more than the tithe. I am not standing on the corner with a pitiful sign that says, “homeless.” I don’t deserve any of it—except by his grace.

SONG: Amazing Grace (verse three, as above)

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Oh God, thank you for your provision of our “daily bread” that sustains our bodies while your grace-full Holy Spirit sustains our souls.

—Dan Nolta

BIBLE READING: 1 Corinthians 10:6-13

“Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.”

So many close calls as a youngster: When I was less than two years old my mom found me hanging from the old fashioned light bulb on a cord that was over my crib. At five years I fell into the neighbor's swimming pool and only the teenage daughter's arrival home kept me from being a childhood drowning statistic. And then some adult chaplain behaviors like riding along with the police and going in pursuit at 100+ miles an hour. “Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come.”

Today I look back and think, “Those were not the real dangers. The real dangers come in the possible moral and spiritual failures, and heart-breaking addictions that plague so many.” Can't we all look back and see the close calls—the bad choices—from which the grace of God helped us escape?

At this time in my life I can only be a bit more careful and very, very thankful that the grace of God was in operation even when I was not old enough—or later, spiritually insightful enough—to recognize it for what it was. But it was there. I see it now, and personally, I am expecting that it will lead me home!

SONG: Amazing Grace (verse four, as above)

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, what can I say
but “thank you”?*

—Dan Nolta

BIBLE READING: 2 Corinthians 4:8-16

“Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.”

When one hits 71 (I am writing on my birthday, August 5th!) one is definitely past middle age and “on the downhill slide.” And I am just fine with that! Right now there is only a cholesterol problem, totally under control with some meds; a bit of arthritis in one big toe and one little finger, on opposite sides of my body so I am all balanced out. But each and every day I know that this verse of “Amazing Grace” is one day closer.

In the last few months I conducted funerals for two of God’s saints, both over 90 years old. What a thrill to watch the grace of their lives extend over so many years. As for my own longevity? Maybe 90-plus, or?

Could I—could we—just live each day in total understanding that someday, this “old clay pot” is going to crack and spring a leak or maybe just fall apart? Knowing what happens next—knowing that “within the veil” there is an eternal life of joy and peace—makes the end of this earthly life seem more attractive each day. At the same time, we understand, that if we are still alive, God is not done with us yet; there is more fruit to be gathered and grace to be enjoyed.

SONG: Amazing Grace (verse five, as above)

PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, help us to live each and every day as if it were our last.

—Dan Nolta

BIBLE READING: 2 Thessalonians 2:16

“When we’ve been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise
Than when we’d first begun.”

The most stirring verse of the most stirring song—reputed to have been written, not by John Newton, but by an anonymous writer—always causes our voices to increase and our hearts to swell with anticipation. Any why wouldn’t they?

So much misery around us and it seems to increase day by day. Uncertainty and fear are upon our land and we truly don’t know what tomorrow will bring. In the uncertainty of our day my heart resonates with John Newton’s words when he spoke of the failing of his memory: “My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things, that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior.” We can all say “amen” to that declaration.

Isn’t that all we need to know in this day? If we keep these two things in mind, in spite of any uncertainty, we will keep life in proper perspective. And one day we shall surely find the reality in the words of the unknown author, “We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we’d first begun.”

SONG: Amazing Grace (verse six, as above)

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, I am a great sinner but you are a greater Savior. Holy Spirit, please remind me of that each and every day.

—Dan Nolta