

a contemporary experience of grace

With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling:
we shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our
exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the
place for the first time. T.S. Eliot



grace

the invitation to live our humanity fully
in response to the energy of love acting by resonance
within the unfolding nature of Life Itself

According to the current belief system of the author of this article, the nature of grace encompasses a call/response element which is so eloquently expressed in the words of T.S. Eliot above. Such a *call/response* element involves the invitation to live our humanity fully in response to the energy of love acting by resonance within the unfolding nature of Life Itself.

Also intrinsic to the nature of grace are the three qualities of faith, hope and love.

Faith: the capacity of each individual to seek and discover meaning in their world at any given time. Hope: the capacity of each individual to experience transformative shifts in their view of Selfhood, grounded in reality. Selfhood here means personal identity, purpose and belonging. Love: the capacity to experience authentic relationship with Self, with others and with the wider Earth community.

The following poem reveals something of the way grace has taken form within the life of one individual. The poem highlights the major shifts in the individual's view of Selfhood in response to their ongoing lived experience.

A Story of grace


When once asked in an interview, "who are you?"
I heard myself saying, "I am who I am!"
On leaving the interview,
the words continued to whirl within my mind.
"Who are you, who are you?"
"I am who I am"
but . . . who am I?"
"How did I get to be who I am?"
I let my mind wander back through time . . . re-viewing my story.

Initially, I am formed by
belonging,
believing without question,
keeping the peace at any cost,
living as part of a "we,"
the "we" of my family, my culture, my religion - all Christian.

I know God.
I know Truth.
Ask me and I will tell you
I am not selfish.
I want you to know the Truth too.
The Truth is the Christian God - the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit.

Living life is simple:
read the bible,
live as Jesus did,
convert others into the Kingdom.
The demarcation lines are clear
We Christians are in, all others are out.
Thank God, I'm in.

Within this view of Selfhood
I am who I am
I am a child of the Christian God.
My lived experience and identity are unwittingly named,
nay embedded in my cultural context of Christianity.
And yes, life is simple,
however, there is no real depth of relationship.
Not with myself, not with others, not with God.



A door opens . . .
I know not where it leads
however, I feel beckoned on.
I step through the doorway.
I enter into a world of ideas.
I begin a theological degree.

Philosophy, history, theology, biblical studies.
My world grows so much bigger.
So exciting!

Initially, the door stays open.
I travel back and forth between this world of ideas about Truth
and the communal meaning making construct of God as Father.

I then begin to feel a gulf between myself and the community
a chasm opening up
a discordance in the chord of belonging.
I journey through this world of ideas,
until one fateful day I wake to the horror
. . . God is dead.
God as Father, Father God as Truth is dead.
The only God I know is dead.
A chill runs through my being.

That door now slams shut with a violence
I am locked out
I no longer belong
I am no longer simple, neat, compliant
I am no longer a dutiful member of the exclusive club.

"Good riddance," I scream.
"I don't want you either!"
I'm hurt. I'm angry.
First at "them." Then at God.
How could you do this to me!
I gave my life to you!
The wounding goes deep.

I then turn the anger in on myself.
I feel embarrassed.
How could I have been so naive, so stupid?
I make a promise to myself
Never, never again will I be so gullible.
My heart will only give itself to what my mind gives assent
I will have an intellectual faith.
There is a drivenness to know more, more, more.

Within this view of Selfhood
I am who I am
I am because I think . . . because I question.
I use my head to protect my heart.

Another door opens and I step through
I feel myself fall . . .
falling deeper, faster, down, down, down into darkness.
I land with a thud
on the cold, damp, rocky floor
of the dark abyss of meaningless.
I feel abandoned.
I lay alone
in foetal position
in the darkness.

Who am I, if not a child of the Father God?
Who am I, if not a part of the community of faith?
I cannot go back.
Yet, I have no way of moving on.
I am trapped in the abyss.

Society is no help. They also are trapped,
trapped in post-modernity.
There is no framework of formation from which to transform.
I am meant to be a social being
however, one needs a "self" to be social.

In this post-modern era
Who is anyone?
What is anyone?
Is there a God?
Is there an "I" to be represented?
Or, only a reflection, of a reflection, of a reflection

Am I simply a character in a play?
Today I will play a mother or, perhaps
a sister
a lover
a daughter
a student
So many perspectives!
Yet there is a hollowness to them.

Who will I choose to be today?
How will I decide ?
What criteria do I use?
How do I construct meaning
in a world that is just perspectives?
How do I choose what to live for, what to die for?
How can I be part of a community?
What is truth? What is reality?
Is the communal quest irrelevant?

This loss of self leaves a sense of annihilation.
This void of nothingness would be too much to bear
if it were not for a faint cry within
"life is more than theatre"
"life has meaning."
The invitation of transformation is heard.

My eyes become accustomed to the darkness of the abyss.
I perceive a way forward.
Ironically the way forward
is to stay still
stay silent.
And within the silence of the Abyss
I find a silence within myself
Within the silence of myself
I encounter Presence.

Such Presence cannot be named.
It can only be experienced
as "deep calling unto deep." (Psalm 42:7 NRSV)
I sense I am coming home to myself.
No longer a child of the Father-God image.
I am maturing as a human being.

Within this view of Selfhood
I am who I am
I am precious and passionate human being,
who breathes within the breath of the primordial presence of Love.

Now . . . there is light within the Abyss.
I see that I am not alone, as I had thought.
There are signs of many others who have been in this place.



Another door opens . . .
I don't hesitate
I dance through
If the Reality of Love is to be found in the Abyss,
Then Love abounds everywhere.

The Story of grace continues . . .
Continues within an individual
in the company of many individuals
all with an experience of the Reality of Love
all living deeply from their own faith tradition,
while holding it open-handedly.

Individuals, listening to each other
sharing their faith stories,
sharing their perceptions,
no one perception privileged over another,
no one perception more authentic
each being deepened by the other
in authentic encounter.

Within this view of Selfhood
I am who I am
I am an Earthling.
Awakened to find myself within a new Story
of the way the world came to be and my place within it,
I stand within my own ground, openheartedly,
responding to the invitation of Life Itself
to walk humbly within the Earth community
with wisdom and compassion,
forgiveness and an unqualified 'yes' to life.

The invitation remains . . .
to continue to embrace the unfolding dance of grace.