

God's Grace: My Experience

Shared by Carol Younger

Sunday, March 19 at Plymouth Church Worship Service



Dear God. I started to pray that day the way I had always started my prayers, the ones I said around a table, the ones we prayed at church, the ones sometimes offered at bedtime. But that afternoon, my need to pray felt more intense than I had ever experienced. I was unsure about who I was, worried about the future, disappointed with my personal limitations. I wanted to be farther down the road than I was; I wanted to be someone I wasn't. I was frustrated and scared, hurt and confused, lonely with looming decisions to make, unsure where to turn or exactly who to trust. I needed to pray, but needed more than the kind of praying I was familiar with.

Dear God. I tried the posture of head bowed, eyes closed. I thought about the one I was praying to. The questions about God that were running through my mind kept me distant from this prayer even as I tried to pray it. I was watching myself go through the motions, analyzing whether I was praying right. I was critiquing my word choice, editing my thoughts, looking for some magic key to unlock the experience I hoped for.

I told God how hard it was to share my mind and heart with someone I couldn't see. *What should* I see when I closed my eyes to pray? I thought about the face of Christ that I knew from art and movies. I imagined what Jesus of Scripture looked like as he listened.

My great need for God that long afternoon finally overwhelmed the questions I had. I sat with my longing for quite awhile, offering God small, awkward expressions of what I thought and felt.

Then, slowly, something more *graceful* began to happen. My frustration about not knowing how to pray, when I desperately wanted to, gave way to a sense of stillness, a sense of being heard. I stopped trying to picture God, and began to see myself more clearly, as though God and I were looking at my life together. I started to recognize the many ways that I had been less than honest with myself, and the people I loved, and with God, the ways I had put up a front. I saw how easy it was for me to pretend to be someone else, to downplay my mistakes but hold grudges when others made them, to care more about appearances than I cared about living authentically. I saw how much I needed God's help to become the person I wanted to be. That afternoon God's grace helped me peel off layer after layer of the pretense and regret I wore until I felt my face and heart were clean. God's grace showed me the joy and hope of a fresh start, a new life lived with God. It's an experience I remember and hold onto. It's an experience God is always inviting us to repeat.