

8/3/14 "GOD'S UMERITED GRACE"

MR. JOHN NEWTON WAS RIGHT ON WHEN HE PENNED THESE IMMORTAL WORDS:
"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 ARE FOR US FAMILIAR WORDS OF A FAMILIAR HYMN THAT CAUSES US TO REFLECT, NOT ONLY UPON THE GREATNESS OF OUR GOD BUT ALSO ON HIS COMPASSION, LOVE AND MERCY.

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU BELOVED, BUT I THANK GOD THIS MORNING THAT OUR'S IS A GRACE RELIGION. YOU SEE THE TERM GRACE SETS US APART FROM ALL OTHER RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD-IN ALL OTHERS YOU HAVE TO ATTAIN SALVATION THROUGH SOME HUMAN ACHIEVMENT OR HUMAN EFFORT. SOMETHING YOU ACCOMPLISH RELIGIOUSLY OR MORALLY OR A COMBINATION OF BOTH, INORDER TO OBTAIN FAVOR FROM THE god's BUT THE CHRISTIAN, THE CHILD OF THE LIVING GOD IS SAVED BY GRACE; IN THAT HE OR SHE CAN EARN NOTHING FROM THIS GOD AS IT RELATES TO HIS OR HER SALVATION; PLEASE NOTE THAT OUR FAITH, OUR BELIEF AS IT RELATES TO OUR SALVATION IS BASED ON GOD'S GOODNESS;..THINK ABOUT FOR A MOMENT; **WE DESERVE NOTHING, BUT HE GIVES US EVERTHING, TELL ME WHO IS IT;..THAT COULD'NT SERVE A GOD LIKE THAT?**

THE WORD GRACE APPEARS OR IS USED OVER A 155 TIMES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES AND FOR THE MOST PART IT IS THERE TO REVEAL GOD'S FAVOR, GOD GOODNESS, HIS MERCY AND GOD'S GENEROSITY SHOWN TO THOSE WHO FOR THE MOST PART WERE UNDERSEVING.

BELOVED, THIS WAS THE CASE IN OUR PRINCIPLE TEXT FOR THE MEDITATION THIS MORNING: THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON: FOUND IN LUKE'S GOSPLE 15th CHAPTER.

NOW, FOR ME PERSONALLY, AND THIS IS JUST HOMER. THERE IS NO OTHER STORY TOLD BY OUR LORD, IN ALL THE GOSPLE NARRITIVES THAT PORTRAY THE ABUNDANCE OF GOD'S GRACE LIKE THIS PARABLE OF A FATHER AND HIS TWO SONS.

AND IT SAYS THAT THE YOUNGER OF THE TWO SONS APPROACHED HIS FATHER ONE DAY AND SAID TO HIM, **"FATHER GIVE ME MY SHARE OF THE ESTATE"**. NOW ACCORDING TO THE DEUTERNOMIC CODE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, HE WOULD HAVE RECEIVED HIS SHARE OF THE INHERITANCE AT THE TIME OF HIS FATHER'S DEATH. BUT HE COULD NOT WAIT. IN OTHER WORDS, I WANT NOW, FATHER, WHAT WILL BE COMING TO ME ANYWAY AFTER YOU ARE GONE. ONE WRITER SAYS THAT THIS ATTITUDE ON THE PART OF THE YOUNGER SON SHOWED A SPIRIT OF ARROGANCE AND A TOTAL DISREGARD FOR HIS FATHER'S AUTHORITY AS HEAD OF THE FAMILY. IN OTHER WORDS AS FAR AS HE WAS CONCERNED HIS FATHER WAS ALREADY DEAD.

THIS FATHER BEING A GENEROUS AND COMPASSIONATE FATHER WENT AHEAD AND DIVIDED HIS PROPERTY BETWEEN THE TWO SONS. THE YOUNGER OF THE TWO CASHED IN ON HIS PORTION OF THE INHERITANCE AND HEADED FOR THE FAR-COUNTRY. IT SEEMS AS THOUGH IT WAS HIS INTENT TO GET AWAY AS FAR FROM HIS FATHER AND HIS BROTHER AS HUMANLY POSSIBLE. YES!, LIKE SO MANY BELOVED, IN THIS WALK OF LIFE WHO WILL TRY TO RUN AS FAR AS THEY CAN FROM THEIR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN. THEY WILL TRAVEL TO THEIR FAR-COUNTIES AND SEEK TO BE COMPLETELY FREE FROM THE LOVING CARE OF THEIR CREATOR.

THE WORD SAYS, WHILE THERE IN THE FAR-COUNTRY THE YOUNGER SON BECAME DESTITUTE BECAUSE HE SQUANDERED ALL OF HIS INHERITANCE ON RIOTOUS LIVING. AND, ON TOP OF ALL THAT, THE WORDS SAYS THAT THERE WAS A SEVERE FAMINE IN THE WHOLE COUNTRY, AND HE BEGAN TO BE IN NEED. GOT HIMSELF A JOB THOUGH, A JOB FEEDING PIGS. AND WHILE HE WAS THERE IN THE PIG-STY, IT SAYS THAT HE BECAME SO HUNGRY THAT HE COULD HAVE FEASTED ON THE PODS THAT THE PIGS WERE EATING; FOR NO ONE WOULD GIVE HIM ANYTHING.

THE ONLY PROBLEM THOUGH THIS YOUNG'STER WAS A JEWISH KID AND ACCORDING TO THE LEVITICUS LAW IT WAS NOT ONLY FORBIDDEN FOR A JEW TO SACRIFICE THE PIG ON GOD'S ALTAR OR TO EAT PORK BUT IT WAS EVEN FORBIDDEN FOR A JEW IN THAT DAY TO TOUCH A PIG. IF HE DID HE WAS CONSIDERED UNCLEAN. NOT ONLY THAT BUT THE MERE FACT THAT HE ENDS UP IN A PIG-STY, BROUGHT SHAME ON HIS FATHER AND HIS WHOLE FAMILY BY HIS BEHAVIOR.

BELOVED, EVERYTIME I READ THIS STORY OR THAT LAW OVER THERE IN LEVITICUS, I THANK MY GOD THAT I AM LIVING IN THIS DAY AND TIME AND BLESSED TO BE CHRISTIAN. YES! I THANK HIM FOR JESUS, WHO CAME ALL THE WAY DOWN FROM GLORY TO NOT ONLY CLEANSE AND SAVED MY SOUL, BUT HE TOOK THE TABBOO OFF THAT PIG, SO YOU AND I COULD HAVE SOME BAR-B-QUE RIBS, AND SOME HAM, ISN'T THAT RIGHT? AND, BEFORE I COULD AFFORD RIBS AND HAM BACK IN THE DAY, I THANK HIM THAT THERE WERE STILL PLENTY OF PIG-FEET, PIG-EARS, PIG-TAILS, HOG MAWS AND CHITTERINGS.

HOWEVER, THAT POOR PRODIGAL FOUND HIMSELF NEAR STARVATION BECAUSE HE WAS FORBIDDEN BY LAW TO EAT WHAT WAS AVAILABLE AND BEING WHO HE WAS AND WHAT HE WAS, AND WHERE HE CAME FROM, NOBODY IN THE FAR-COUNTRY CARED WHETHER HE STARVED OR NOT. BELOVED, I STOPPED BY THIS MORNING TO SAY THAT IS A SAD STATE AND A TERRIBLE FIX TO BE IN. TO BE IN A SITUATION WHERE NOBODY CARES. THE WRITER DAVID UNDERSTOOD THE PRODIGALS PREDICAMENT.; WHEN HE WROTE, **"I LOOKED TO MY RIGHT AND SEE, NO ONE IS CONCERNED FOR ME, I HAVE NO REFUGE, NO ONE CARES FOR MY LIFE."**

THE WORDS SAYS THAT AT THAT POINT THE YOUNG MAN CAME TO HIMSELF, AND SAID, **“HOW MANY OF MY FATHER’S HIRED SERVANTS HAVE BREAD TO SPARE AND HERE I AM STARVING TO DEATH, I WILL ARISE AND GO TO MY FATHER, AND I WILL SAY TO HIM. ‘FATHER, I HAVE SINNED AGAINST HEAVEN, AND BEFORE YOU. I AM NO LONGER WORTHY TO BE CALLED YOUR SON: TREAT ME LIKE ONE OF YOUR HIRED SERVANTS.”** AND HE AROSE AND CAME TO HIS FATHER. NOW BELOVED, THIS IS WHERE THE RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD. IT SAY WHILE HE WAS YET AT A GREAT DISTANCE, HIS FATHER SAW HIM AND HAD COMPASSION, AND RAN AND EMBRACED HIM AND KISSED HIM. WATCH THIS, IT SAYS, **“THE FATHER SAW HIM”**

NOW I DON’T KNOW WHETHER THE SON SAW HIS FATHER COMING OR NOT, BUT THE FATHER SAW HIM. I JUST BELIEVE THAT LONG BEFORE THIS DAY ARRIVED, THE FATHER WOULD GO OUT TO EDGE OF HIS PROPERTY EVERY EVENING BEFORE THE SUN GO DOWN AND PEER-OUT OVER THE HORIZION, PRAYING THAT HIS PRODIGAL WOULD ONE DAY COME. IT SAYS, THE FATHER RAN, AND I CAN JUST IMAGINE THAT AT HIS AGE HE WAS PROBABLY OUT OF BREATH, BUT THANK GOD, HE WAS NOT OUT OF LOVE. IT SAYS THAT HE RAN. IT WAS PROBABLY NOT A DIGINIFIED WAY FOR HIM TO BE ACTING, FOR IN A MALE DOMINATED SOCIETY IN THAT DAY AND TIME THE HEAD ON THE HOUSEHOLD JUST DIDN’T BEHAVED THAT WAY. BUT THE WORD SAYS, WHEN HE SAW HIM, DIGNITY AND UPRIGHTNESS WENT OUT THE WINDOW, FOR HE RAN TO HIS SON THREW HIS ARMS AROUND HIM AND KISSED HIM.

THE ACT OF EMBRACING OR A HUG AND KISS IN TIME OF JESUS WAS A COMMON OCCURRENCE. YOU WILL FIND THAT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT WRITINGS THE ACT OF EMBRACING FOLLOWED BY A KISS WAS GIVEN AS A SIGN OF ENDEARMENT AND AFFECTION IN THE SPIRIT OF RECONCILATION. I ESPECIALLY RECALL BACK IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS 45, WHERE JOSEPH FORGAVE HIS BROTHERS WHO EARLIER ON, SOLD HIM IN SLAVERY TO AN EGYPTIAN CARAVAN THAT WAS PASSING BY. RECALL THAT?. ALL BECAUSE THEY WERE JEALOUS OF THEIR FATHER’S SPECIAL AFFECTION AND LOVE FOR HIM. MANY YEARS PASSED AND THE BROTHERS TRAVELED TO EGYPT SEEKING FOOD AND PROVISIONS BECAUSE OF S GREAT FAMINE IN THE LAND, NOT KNOWING THAT THEIR BROTHER JOSEPH WAS STILL ALIVE AND INCHARGE OF PHARAOH’S WAREHOUSES. THEY CAME BEFORE HIM SEEKING HELP FOR THEIR HUNGRY PEOPLE BACK HOME. THE BOOK SAYS THAT WHEN JOSEPH SAW HIS BROTHERS HE FELL UPON THEIR NECKS WEEPING ALOUD, AND EMBRACING AND KISSING THEM, FROM THE YOUNGEST BENJAMIN TO THE ELDEST. JUST THINK, IN SPITE OF WHAT HAD HAPPEN TO HIM, IN SPITE OF HOW THEY TREATED HIM STILL HE HELD NO GRUDGE AND NO ANIMOSITY IN HIS HEART. FOR HE KNEW THAT WHAT THEY HAD MEANT FOR EVIL, GOD TURNED IT INTO GOOD FOR ALL.

BELOVED, IN OUR STORY THIS MORNING, AT THAT PIVOTAL MOMENT, THAT EMBRACE, THAT HUG AND KISS FROM THE FATHER, AT THAT VERY MOMENT INSTILLED IN THE SON, THE PRODIGAL A FEELING OF REASSURANCE THAT HE WAS SAFE AT HOME AT LAST. THAT IN SPITE OF HIS PREVIOUS ACTIONS AS FAR AS THE FATHER WAS CONCERNED HE WAS STILL WORTHWHILE, HE WAS STILL LOVED. YES!, HE WAS RETURNING IN HUMILIATION AND SHAME, YES!, HE WAS STILL IN RAGS AND FILTH, NO DOUBT, REACKING WITH THE SMELL OF THE PIG-STY STILL ABOUT HIM. BUT THAT HUG AND KISS FROM HIS FATHER BROUGHT ABOUT VALIDATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT. AT THAT VERY MOMENT HE, THE PRODIGAL KNEW AS NEVER BEFORE THAT HIS FATHER LOVED HIM. I DON'T CARE WHAT ANYBODY SAYS, PEOPLE NEED LOVING THE MOST, WHEN THEY DESERVE IT THE LEAST.

FAR AS I AM CONCERNED. HE DESERVE TO PAY FOR WHAT HE DID TO HIS FATHER, FOR WHAT HE PUT YOU KNOW SOMEONE JUST MIGHT BE SAYING ABOUT NOW THAT YOUNG MAN GOT OFF TOO EASY AS HIS FATHER THROUGH. FOR SOME, THIS KIND OF UNDESERVED CHARITY MAKES THEM ANGRY. WHY?, BECAUSE FOR ONE THING. THIS YOUNG MAN IN THE STORY TREATED HIS FATHER WITH CONTEMP AND TOTAL DISRESPECT. FORGETTING HOWEVER THAT THIS STORY IS TOLD BY JESUS, THAT IS "EMMANUEL", MEANING "GOD WITH US" SAYS BRO. MATTHEWS. TOLD AT THE TIME TO THOSE UNDER THE SOUND OF HIS VOICE AND ALSO TO THOSE WHO WOULD COME LATER, THE WONDER AND THE POWER OF THE FATHER'D AMAZING GRACE; GOD'S UNMERITED FAVOR. YOU SEE, BELOVED, IT'S THE KIND OF FAVOR THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE FROM A HUMAN POINT OF VIEW. BUT GRACE, GOD'S AMAZING GRACE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH RULES OF THE GAME, OR FAIRNESS, BUT THIS GRACE, GOD'S AMAZING GRACE HAS EVERYTHING TO DO WITH HIS UNMERITED FAVOR AND LOVE , THE LOVE THAT COVERS A MULTITUDE OF SIN SAYS PETER. (1PETER4:8), **"FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD"** WROTE BRO. PAUL . **BUT GOD DEMONSTRATES HIS LOVE FOR US IN THIS, WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US.**

YES! I AGREE, ON THE SURFACE IT MAY SEEM UNFAIR AND EVEN OUTRAGEOUS FOR THE FATHER TO FORGIVE. BUT IT COMES CLOSE TO WHAT SOMEONE CALLED, "RADICAL HOSPITALITY" A LOVE THAT ONE SONG WRITER WAS TALKING ABOUT WHEN HE SAYS, **"O LOVE, THAT WOULD NOT LET ME GO. I REAST MY WEARY SOUL IN THEE, I GIVE THEE BACK THE LIFE I OWE, THAT IN THINE OCEAN DEPTHS IT FLOWS MAY RICHER FULLER BE.** THIS FATHER, LIKE OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN, FORGIVES EVEN WHEN WE DO NOT DESERVE

THINK ABOUT IT, LOVE STARTED FLOWING FROM THE LIPS OF THIS FATHER IN OUR TEXT EVEN BEFORE THE SON COULD FINISH HIS CONFESSION. QUICKLY, HE SAYS, BRING OUT A ROBE, NOT ANY ROBE, BUT THE BEST ONE AND PUT IT ON HIM, PUT A RING ON HIS FINGER AND SHOES ON HIS FEET, AND GET THE FATTED CALF AND PREPARE IT, AND LET US EAT AND

CELEBRATE, FOR THIS SON OF MINE WAS DEAD AND IS ALIVE AGAIN. HE WAS LOST AND IS FOUND. INSPITE OF ALL THAT YOU HAVE DONE, YOU BELONG TO ME, YOU ARE MINE, HOWEVER FAR YOU HAVE GONE YOU ARE STILL BONE OF MY BONE AND FLESH OF MY FLESH.

IN THIS STORY JESUS WILL HAVE YOU TO KNOW THIS MORNING, THAT IF YOU COME, JUST COME, JUST MOVE IN HIS DIRECTION, GOD THE FATHER WILL OWN YOU;..IF YOU COME CONFESSING YOUR SIN THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD. HE IS FAITHFUL AND JUST TO FORGIVE YOUR SIN AND CLEANSE YOU FROM ALL UNRIGHTOEUSNESS. FOR IF ANYONE SINS WE HAVE AN ADVOCATE WITH THE FATHER, CHRIST JESUS THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HE IS THE EXPIATION FOR OUR SINS; AND NOT FOR OYRS ONLY, BUT FOR THE S9NS OF THE WHOLE WORLD.

HOWEVER, BELOVED, BEFORE I TAKE MY SEAT THE WORD SAYS THAT THERE WAS ANOTHER BROTHER, THE ELDER BROTHER, THE UNFORGIVING BROTHER, THE POUTING BROTHER. THE BROTHER WHO WA SO ANGRY THAT HE STAYED OUT IN THE FIELDS WORKING SO THAT HE WOULD NOT HAVE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE YOUNGER BROTHERS HOMECOMING CELEBRATION. OH YES! HE WAS THE ONE WHO STAYED AT HOME. HE DIDN'T RUN OFF TO SOME FAR-COUNTRY. PROBABLY SAVED ALL OF HIS SHARE OF THE INHERITANCE, NO DOUBT HE HAD A FAT BANK ACCOUNT AND WAS VERY RESPECTED IN AND AROUND THE COMMUNITY. AND NOT ONLY THAT, BUT HE WAS PROBABLY CAREFUL TO OBSERVE ALL OF THE HOLY DAYS AND WAS CAREFUL TO WORSHIP ON THE SABBATH ON A REGULAR BASIS. HE WAS PROBABLY THE KIND THAT MADE SURE HE DOTTED EVERY I AND CROSSED EVERY T. BUT I CONTEND THIS MORNING THAT HE WAS ALSO LOST. HE WAS LOST IN HIS OWN BACKYARD.

BELOVED, YOU DON'T HAVE TO LEAVE HOME TO BE LOST. IF ONE IS NOT CAREFUL;..THAT IS, IF ONE IS NOT FORGIVING, IF ONE HAS NOT LEARNED TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER LIKE THE FATHER LOVES THEM. THEY CAN STILL BE LOST. LOST AT HOME, YES! LOST IN THEIR OWN BACK YARD, AND YES, LOST IN THE CHURCH HOUSE, FOR YOU SEE, IT NOR HOW MANY TIMES ONE MAY BE IN THE CHURCH, BUT IT IS THE AMOUNT OF CHURCH THAT IS IN THEM.

FINALLY, THE FATHER IN OUR PARABLE EXEMPLIFIES OUR HEAVENLY FATHER WHO LOVES ALL HIS CHILDREN WITH A LOVE THAT IS MORE THAT LOVE, A LOVE THAT WOULD NOT LET THEM GO. THAT IS, A SACRIFICIAL LOVE, A LOVE THAT HAS NO BOUNDS, A LOVE THAT HAS NO LIMITS.THE KIND OF LOVE THAT WOULD CAUSE HIM TO GIVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON TO DIE ON AN OLD RUGGED CROSS FOR THE SINS OF THE WHOLE WORLD. THE SONG WRITER SUMS IT UP BEAUTIFULLY WHEN HE WROTE, "I WAS SINKING DEEP IN SIN FAR FROM THE PEACEFUL SHORE SINKING VERY DEEP WITHIN SINKING TO RISE NO MORE, BUT THE MASTER OF THE SEA HEARD MY DISPARING CRY, AND FROM THE WATERS LIFTED ME, NOW SAFE AM I. LOVE LIFTED ME, LOVE LIFTED ME, WHEN NOTHING ELSE COULD LOVED LIFTED ME."