

27th August 2020

Grace

“Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.”

Bible, Romans 5:20

The words “grace” and “gracious” are most often used in a gentle and sensitive context, implying passivity, an unengaged waiting, a peaceful and unobtrusive presence. But was this what John Newton had in mind when he wrote “Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me”? For this is the Grace of God, fully effective, engaging with the struggles of humanity, sweet to the sound but strong to the action.

Perhaps Shakespeare had it right in *Anthony and Cleopatra*:

*She looks like sleep,
As she would catch a second Anthony
In her strong toil of grace.*

For grace here is active, a “strong toil”, a purposeful attribute, which can inform who we are and the way we engage with one another.

A former chaplaincy colleague, reflecting on the tensions he experienced through times of change in his hospice, recalled that some staff, even the mild-mannered ones, had lost their perspective and had become unfairly critical of others. “We were all in it together and needed patience and understanding,” he recalled, and said his prayer was: “May Grace abound.” And he’s right! In any enterprise, when we seek purpose and direction, we need to be gracious with one another, *actively* gracious, *purposefully* gracious, more than we’ve been before. “May Grace abound.”

Paul had his finger on the issue in his letter to the Romans. In periods of difficulty we need to be even more gracious. Thank God he found that “grace did much more abound”, the more sin sought to take a hold.

One of this Sunday’s Lectionary readings for our worship is about Moses and the Burning Bush, in which we find the Church of Scotland mantra: *Nec Tamen Consumebatur* – “Nevertheless, it was not consumed”. Perhaps from now on “May Grace Abound” might become a recognised, equally strong and powerfully prophetic alternative.

A prayer for today

May grace abound. Lord, that’s enough of a prayer from me and for me today. Amen.

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