

Grace Upon Grace

Grace from the Summit

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Oh, no! She sits alone, the city that was once full of people. Once great among nations, she has become like a widow. Once a queen over provinces, she has become a slave. She weeps bitterly in the night, her tears on her cheek. None of her lovers comfort her. All her friends lied to her; they have become her enemies. Judah was exiled after suffering and hard service. She lives among the nations; she finds no rest. All who were chasing her caught her—right in the middle of her distress. Zion’s roads are in mourning; no one comes to the festivals. All her gates are deserted. Her priests are groaning, her young women grieving. She is bitter. Her adversaries have become rulers; her enemies relax. Certainly the Lord caused her grief because of her many wrong acts. Her children have gone away, captive before the enemy. Daughter Zion lost all her glory. Her officials are like deer that can’t find pasture. They have gone away, frail, before the hunter.

Lamentations 1:1-6

Alongside Babylon’s rivers we sat on the banks; we cried and cried, remembering the good old days in Zion. Alongside the quaking aspens we stacked our unplayed harps; that’s where our captors demanded songs, sarcastic and mocking: “Sing us a happy Zion song!” Oh, how could we ever sing God’s song in this wasteland? If I ever forget you, Jerusalem, let my fingers wither and fall off like leaves. Let my tongue swell and turn black if I fail to remember you, if I fail, O dear Jerusalem, to honor you as my greatest. God, remember those Edomites, and remember the ruin of Jerusalem, that day they yelled out, “Wreck it, smash it to bits!” And you, Babylonians—ravagers! A reward to whoever gets back at you for all you’ve done to us. Psalm 137

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” The Lord replied, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you. “Would any of you say to your servant, who had just come in from the field after plowing or tending sheep, ‘Come! Sit down for dinner’? Wouldn’t you say instead, ‘Fix my dinner. Put on the clothes of a table servant and wait on me while I eat and drink. After that, you can eat and drink’? You won’t thank the servant because the servant did what you asked, will you? In the same way, when you have done everything required of you, you should say, ‘We servants deserve no special praise. We have only done our duty.’” Luke 17:5-10

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lamentations. Psalm 137. Really chipper and uplifting ways to begin a stewardship campaign, right? Nothing says “let’s talk about generosity” like stories of exile, destruction, and weeping by foreign rivers. But here they are, lifted up for today, and I think there’s wisdom in not skipping over them. Because the truth is, life is not always easy, church is not always flourishing, and money is not always abundant. Yet even in the middle of lament, God’s people are still talking to God. They are still showing up. They are still turning their faces toward the one they trust will not abandon them. And maybe that is where grace begins: not in perfect circumstances, but in God’s steady presence that meets us right where we are.

This morning I'm excited to invite you into a journey we are calling *Grace Upon Grace: A Mountain Journey in Stewardship*. Over the next three weeks we will climb to the summit, walk through the valleys, and look over the plains toward the horizon. While these are beautifully scenic Colorado-friendly images, they are also ways of talking about how God's grace moves through our lives. At the summit, we see where grace begins. In the valleys, we discover how grace grows in us. And over the plains, we see how grace flows outward into the world.

Stewardship, then, is not something we create or something we muster up by our own strength. It is not a program we invent or a burden we carry alone. It is a stream that is already flowing from the heart of God, and we are invited to step into it. John's Gospel puts it this way: "From Christ's fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." That is the starting point. Long before we pledge a dollar, long before we volunteer our time, long before we decide how to serve, there is already an overflowing abundance in Christ. Our stewardship is simply joining that current, letting our lives, our prayers, and our gifts be carried along by the grace that has been flowing since the very beginning.

Over the last few years, I've really gotten into hiking. I went from a mile and a half jaunt through the Smokies to around 150 miles on trails each season, and this year I've hiked on three continents. My favorite, however, is alpine tundra. Above the tree line. I feel so much peace up there, it's magical to me, truly. If you've ever climbed to a summit, you know the mix of exhaustion and exhilaration that comes with standing at the top. The air is thin, the view stretches forever, and the perspective is unlike anything you can get down below. On the scree slopes, which are the small and medium size rocks toward and at the top, you can hear a faint trickle almost all the time. The smallest trickles of snowmelt begin to form streams that eventually join into rivers. What looks insignificant at the source, I mean you can't even see it up there, just hear it trickling through the rocks, that will one day nourish whole valleys. The summit is where you can experience that beginning.

In many ways, that's what this table is for us. The bread and the cup may seem small and insignificant, a bite of bread, a sip of juice, but they are sources of God's abundance. From this summit, grace begins to flow. The same grace that sustained God's people in exile, the same grace that turns lament into hope, the same grace that takes mustard-seed faith and moves mountains, is poured out here.

When the disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith, they were thinking about faith as something measurable, something you could weigh on a scale or count like coins. They thought they needed more of it in order to live as true followers. But Jesus flips that idea on its head. Even faith as small as a mustard seed is enough, because it is not about the size of our faith but about the power of God who makes even the tiniest seed take root and grow. That is what we see here at the table. What looks small and insignificant is in fact the place where God's abundance begins.

This is why the Gospel matters so much for stewardship. Our part may look small, like a trickle of water at the summit or a tiny seed buried in the dirt, but God is not asking us to manufacture greatness. God is asking us to trust. Bread and cup, mustard seed and trickle of water, none of these seem like much, but in God's hands they become life-giving. What we bring may feel small, yet God multiplies it into something that nourishes far beyond what we could imagine. What God multiplies doesn't stay confined to the mountaintop. It flows into every valley and every act of care.

And these places are where stewardship belongs. We don't stand at the summit to admire our own strength or accomplishments, though I do feel real proud when I schlep 20 miles and 7000 feet up a mountain. But no, we are here to remember that everything begins with God's grace. Stewardship is not about re-creating generosity out of thin air; it is about stepping into the river that already flows from the summit. It is about trusting that what seems small in our hands will be multiplied by God into life-giving abundance.

When we read from Lamentations and Psalm 137, I know it can feel heavy. These are voices of people who had lost nearly everything: their home, their city, even the Temple and their center of their worship. They sit by foreign unknown rivers, remembering what once was, and they weep. On the surface, it seems like the opposite of stewardship. What could they possibly give when they had nothing left?

But even in the depth of loss, they are still in relationship with God. They have not moved away from God. Their lament is still prayer, their memory is still faith. Sometimes the most powerful witness is not a triumphant shout of joy but the simple act of turning our faces toward God when everything feels broken. That turning is grace, too.

And that is why these texts matter here and I started off this campaign with them.

Stewardship is not just something we practice when life is smooth and abundant. It is how we live as people of faith in every season. Grace is not cancelled by exile. Grace is not drowned out by tears. Grace keeps flowing even in the hardest places.

So when we bring our gifts, we are joining a stream that is bigger than us. We are saying with our lives that God's mercy has not run dry. Even in the middle of struggle, grace upon grace keeps coming, and we want to be part of its flow.

I think too often we treat stewardship as if it were entirely up to us. We talk about meeting the budget, balancing the books, making sure the lights stay on, etc. And while those things matter, they can make giving feel like just one more task on a long to-do list. But that is not the picture our faith gives us. Stewardship is not a duty we perform or a weight we carry. Stewardship is joining in with what God is already doing.

Think again of the streams you see moving off of the summit of our beautiful Rocky Mountains. We don't make the water flow. We don't decide where it begins or how far it will

reach. The snowmelt is already moving. Our choice is whether to notice it, step into it, and let it carry us down the river. That is what our giving is. We are not inventing generosity out of nothing here. We are stepping into a river that has been flowing from the heart of God since the beginning.

This is why I truly believe, and the stewardship and budget team can affirm that about me, I believe that stewardship IS joyful. It is not about manufacturing enough faith or wealth to fix the world. It is about joining the stream of grace that is already running through creation. Each gift we bring becomes part of a current that is wider and stronger than any one of us. Together, our giving flows with God's abundance, moving into places we cannot yet see, carrying life and hope far beyond our reach.

Every time we gather at this table we are reminded of the source. The bread looks insignificant, the cup seems ordinary, but from this place flows the abundance of God's grace. Communion is a summit spring where everything begins again. Here, Christ meets us, feeds us, and sends us. Here, we are reminded that grace upon grace is poured into our lives, not because we earned it or deserved it, but because God delights in giving.

That is why this table and World Communion Sunday is the perfect time to talk about stewardship. If we only thought about money or fundraising goals, we would miss the point. Stewardship does not begin with what we can scrape together. It begins here, where we are fed with mercy that never runs dry. At the table, we see the truth that everything we have flows first from God's generosity. Our giving is a response, an echo of what God has already done.

And this meal is never just for us. Communion always points outward. We rise from this table with full hearts so that we can live as generous people in the world. We give because we have first been given to. We share because we have first been fed. The table reminds us

that grace does not stop once it gets to us; it flows through us into the valleys and horizons that wait below.

Today we are on the summit. We have looked out at the view, seen the streams that begin here from the snowmelt, and remembered that everything we are and everything we have flows from God's grace. In the coming weeks we will follow that stream. Next Sunday we will walk into the valleys, where grace nourishes and grows in us. Then we will look to the horizon, where grace flows outward into the world through our commitments and our shared life as a church. This is the journey of Grace Upon Grace.

So let me say this clearly: stewardship is not about pressure or guilt. It is not about proving our worth or even meeting a quota or goal. Stewardship is about trust. It is about joining in the river of God's grace and letting it carry us. In my own giving, it's not because I have everything figured out or because I never worry about money. I give because I want to join the flow of what God is already doing here. I give because I believe in the vision of a world overflowing with Jesus' love, and I want to be part of that abundance.

And now, we come to the table. The bread is normal, the cup is simple, but from this source the river begins again. Grace upon grace is poured into our lives. All that remains is for us to join in, to be moved by the current, and to let God's love flow through us into the world. Amen.