

## JOURNEY OF GRACE

[Click Here](#) for Suggested Music Sources (subject to copyright and performing rights)

**Hymn:** 'Amazing Grace'

**Reflection** by Grace Oliver

Let me let you into a secret. I used to hate this hymn. It reminded me of evangelical mud-groveling used to get people to walk down to the altar at my church. When I learned its historical setting, I had to repent me of my judgmental ignorance. Here is my potted version of that background.

The British Empire at its inception was the English domination of Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. At its heart it was about piracy, theft of land from indigenous peoples and the declared 'might is right' of the Royal Navy. Slavery instituted by monarchy was its source of great wealth and free trade Capitalism its ideology. To crown it all and ending the horrors of the East India Company was the annexation of the whole of India as the Jewel of the Empire. Didn't we establish Pax Britannica? If we did not do it the French would have dominated the world. [Politicians use the same arguments today to justify our nuclear bombs of mass destruction in the fight against communists (or whoever) that would take our capitalism of unconditional greed from us.)

John Newton, the author of 'Amazing Grace' was a small pawn in running our Empire of Greed. As the hymn tells us, a moment in time came when the scales of his blindness fell from him, and his eyes could see the evil of slavery. [The upstanding high church Gladstone family didn't see it and they had more slaves than anyone else.] We can be devout and good and yet in the matters of the heart be so blind, so insensitive, so closed to the demands of love. What was true of Newton is true of us all. We are all so easily fooled by the Father of All Lies that we renounced in our baptism. Our hope in singing this hymn is that we too will have that moment of epiphany.

The Gospel of Christianity is that all of history, like our own personal lives, are on a journey to Love's realization, a journey that extends from the innermost reaches of our hearts and out to the outermost reaches of the Universe. It takes a particular way of seeing to know this truth, the insight that we call faith. John Newton knew the power of grace to be the power that would bring this about because he had known its liberating power in his life. What exactly gives grace this power?

Grace is the kind of love that gives unconditionally, a kind of justice that gives to the undeserving because everyone is a child of God. It is equally the generosity of the voice of love that grants forgiveness unconditionally when it is asked for. Grace is the tenderness that embraces each of us in our fallibility and weaknesses. Unlike the Spirit of the Law, Grace breaks all moral codes because it is redemptive. Grace is the embodiment of the Spirit of Love, the love that accepts each of us entirely as we are and sets us free to be the

best that we can become. All of this is, of course, what is meant by the Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our mouths can say we believe in grace but to really go down deeply to embrace grace in our innermost being and embody this love in a life of Grace is another thing entirely. Kierkegaard was right when he said that there are two types of people. Those who turn around and have the courage to walk towards love and those that run away from love - and most of us run away from unconditional love, the love we call Grace.

I was born to be a woman and called to be a loving woman. The fear and terror of coming out to embrace this truth is an illustration to me of our human tragedy of sin. We say 'yes' to everything but that which will make us whole. My journey to embrace my redemption took almost my entire life. I knew deep down what I was called to be but I could not break out of the social constraints, and personal fears and terrors that would be the consequences of unconditionally saying yes to love's demands to be all that I could be. When eventually I could no longer hold back, the door of my innermost heart blew open. The resulting joy and happiness is beyond words can convey. I didn't care if I was crucified by my neighbours or the Church if I did so. As it happened, I have been very fortunate and known nothing but loving kindness. For one thing, people so much prefer my new self.

My conversion to being Grace, Grace Oliver, is not the conversion of John Newton, at least not in its external dramatic illustration of the power of Grace to set us free from the blindness of the slavery of the soul to its cruelties and superficiality. What is true though is that it parallels it. We had to turn around and stop running away from love and embrace the love of God from the innermost depths of our hearts.

Jesus did not run away from the demands of Love, the love that he was born to incarnate, the loving person he was called to embody, the demand that cost him a torturous death on a cross. The significance of Jesus's resurrection is the mystery of the power of Grace to bring about a new creation, a recreation of our lives, the power of God to bring us back into the Garden of Eden, the reign of Love filling the Universe. We can walk into that reign of love now.

Please do not be like me and wait 70 years to know the fullness and joy of Grace, the fullness of the Gospel of Grace.

**Hymn:** 'Will you follow me if I but call your name?' By John Bell and Graham Moule.

Sung **Psalm 23**

First Reading

**Isaiah 66: 10 - 14**

“Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her.

For you will nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts; you will drink deeply and delight in her overflowing abundance...

I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream; and dandled on her knee. As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.

When you see this, your heart will rejoice.”

Sung **Magnificat** by cathedral choir

Second Reading

**Matthew 5: 3 - 12**

“ Blessed are the poor in spirit,

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,

For they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,

For they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,

For they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,

For they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Sung **Nunc Demittis**

**Communal Prayer** led by Pauline Fleck

Sung **St. Francis Prayer**

**The Blessing** given by Grace Oliver

-----

St Anne’s Church Soho has been the “Home” church of the Sibyls for many years. We are grateful that St Anne’s Church includes the Sibyls in its mission and this service as part of its worship. Hymns and music are covered by Christian Copyright Licensing (Europe) Ltd are reproduced under CCLI No 104840.