**GRACE**

(preferably 15 to 20 minutes)

PURPOSE:

* The ideal talk calls us to live our lives with an ideal. The Grace talk calls us to live out the Christian ideal.
* This talk is intended to inform the participants that God calls us to share a new life in Christ, a life rooted in and empowered by grace. Grace opens us up to an encounter with God where we can become converted to new life.
* This new life of grace transforms us. We become a child of God, a brother or sister of Christ, and a temple of the Holy Spirit.

CORE IDEAS:

* God is inviting us into a new, living relationship.
* We are free to accept or reject this invitation.
* When we accept it, God begins a progressive transformation of our lives – conversion.
* Conversion involves our whole self and our relationships.
* By God’s grace we are able to live an “abundant life.”

INTRODUCTION:

1. Everyone has an ideal. What is the Christian ideal?
2. The Christian ideal is a life rooted in God and empowered by grace.
3. To live this new life of grace, we only need to say “yes” to God’s invitation.

GOD IS INVITING US INTO RELATIONSHIP:

1. God is not remote, difficult to approach or waiting for us to get it “right”.
2. God is present among us, reaching out to us to offer the Divine Presence. This was most clearly demonstrated in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. (We recall God’s love for us in Eucharistic Prayer B, “the goodness and love which you have made known to us in your creation; in calling Israel to be your people; in your Word spoken through the prophets; and above all in the Word made flesh, Jesus your Son” (BCP, p. 368) Jesus is Emmanuel – God with us (Matt: 1:23). (See also Luke 1:8-9; John 4:9-19)
3. God reaches out to us as pure gift – we cannot and do not earn it. (See Eph.1:47; Luke 12:32)
4. This is the first meaning of grace – “God’s favor towards us, unearned and undeserved”. (BCP p. 858)

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS A LIVING RELATIONSHIP:

1. Accepting God’s offer of relationship begins a living encounter with God. We become members of the family of God. (See John 3:1-2; Rom. 8:1-17a)
2. This living encounter is life-giving and soul-filling. God alone is able to fill our empty souls.
3. We receive life – “abundant life” – with the potential of its deepest, most complete fulfillment. (See 1 John 3:1-2; Rom. 8:14-17a)
4. We become “a new creation”, a human being, able to live as the image of God we were intended to be at birth. (See 2 Cor. 5:17ff)
5. This is the second meaning of grace – the gift of God, restoring us to God’s image and likeness. (See 2 Cor. 3:18)

WE ARE FREE TO ACCEPT, REJECT, OR IGNORE THIS INVITATION:

1. Some do not respond because they are too busy with their own agenda. (See Luke 18:18-30: The rich young man)
2. God respects our freedom of choice, but continually offers new life in Christ. We must choose Christ if we are to begin a new life. (One saying in the 12 step community is “Without God, I can’t. Without me, God won’t.”)
3. The good news is – we CAN choose Christ. It is within our power to say “yes” to God’s freely offered invitation to a new life. (See Rom. 10:6-9)

IF AND WHEN WE ACCEPT GOD’S INVITATION, GOD BEGINS A PROGESSIVE TRANSFORMATION OF OUR WHOLE LIVES – CONVERSION:

1. The moment we say “yes” to God we begin to be transformed in every way, that we may fully enjoy our lives in Christ.
   1. For some, this is an instantaneous, dramatic effect.
   2. For many others it is a less dramatic, slow unfolding of a new awareness of God.
   3. For all, it is only the beginning of a lifelong walk with God.
2. Conversion is a lifelong process of turning to God, coming to rely on God more and more in all circumstances of life. (See John 3:1-10: The story of Nicodemus)
   1. It does not happen all at once; it occurs over time.
   2. It is progressive. As we turn to God, we find God ready to deepen our conversion as we grow ready to allow God more and more control in our lives.
   3. By relying on God, we find ourselves growing stronger in peace of mind and the power of love.
3. Conversion means living a life of grace – a life that God’s grace makes possible. (See Gal. 2:20)
4. This is the third meaning of grace; the power God gives us through grace to live more and more from God’s resources and less from those resources which we imagine to be our own.
5. This is the Christian ideal.

CONVERSION INVOLVES THE WHOLE PERSON:

1. The life of grace is often referred to as “salvation” which also means “to be healed” or to be made whole.
2. Our whole conversion includes:
   1. Our intellect – Faith is reasonable and gives new insight to our intellect;
   2. Our emotions - Faith involves, but does not depend upon our feelings;
   3. Our wills – The decision to turn to God is our decision, our choice.
3. Conversion is “metanoia”: a fundamental reorientation of life to God in heart, mind, soul, and strength. (See Acts 2:37-39, translated “repent”, metanoia is to changes one’s way of knowing)

CONVERSION INVOLVES OUR RELATIONSHIPS:

1. We are not saved – made whole – in a “vacuum”. (See the BCP p. 303, “Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?”)
2. We are saved – made whole – in our relationships. (See Col. 3:12-17)
   1. Family;
   2. Friends;
   3. Work relationships;
   4. The created world (nature) as well as the world of our social interactions.
3. God’s grace begins the progressive transformation of all these relationships. It begins when we say “yes” to God’s love for all that has been made.

GOD’S GRACE BRINGS US ABUNDANT LIFE:

1. A life of grace is a rich life filled with God’s love.
2. See John 10:10b

COMMENTARY ON THE OUTLINE:

The clergy person giving this talk may want to include some personal testimony. Personal examples of a changed relationship with God and others can be excellent illustrations of the salient points. It is wise to remember that the candidates are likely to be hesitant at this point. The talk is best if it is reassuring, convincing and yet not overly evangelical. The proclamation in this talk is gentle and reassuring: “Here’s a little of my journey of grace.”

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

*Life of the Beloved* by Henri Nouwen

Amazing Grace by Kathleen Norris

Reaching for the Invisible God by Philip Yancey