



III Advent 2019

Dear Members of the Episcopal Diocese of Central Pennsylvania,

I often speak and write about the Christian path as opening oneself to transformation. Transformation is the process by which we come to know, deeply, the love of God for us and all creation. We can put ourselves in the path to be transformed, but it is only the grace of God, in God's good time, that affects our growing in holiness.

In a culture that prizes achievement, entrepreneurship, and "get up and go," it feels counterintuitive to wait on God to fill us with grace. I think that God is moving and acting with grace all the time; we need to sharpen our focus to see God at work around us and in us.

Sometimes, God's grace sneaks up on us, and we find ourselves awash in holiness as the Holy Spirit breaks in. Last Sunday afternoon, I experienced such a moment: I was sitting in a cavernous Roman Catholic church in Baltimore- St. Cyprian- attending a performance of Handel's Messiah. Like many in the audience, I knew the music well, having sung it several times in choirs through the years. I knew what to expect. I enjoyed the choir, the orchestra, the exceptional soloists, the ornate sculptures and frescos decorating the church, the strong beam of sunlight reaching through the stained glass, landing in a colorful puddle in my pew. Everything felt good and fine- just as I had imagined it would. What I was not prepared for was the sudden breaking in of the Holy Spirit, bringing sharp tears to my eyes as the bass soloist sang his recitative from 1 Corinthians 15:

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep; but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

All at once, I recognized the power of God in my life, my absolute inability to push away or control such a deluge of love, the conviction that God's dream for us is to be changed, and that this gift of being changed would make me- and all who have gone before- whole. It was certainty. It was mighty. It was about deep love, and it was for me. (It's for you, too!)

It was grace.

I left, having had a good cry, filled with the glorious sounds of a time-tested musical masterpiece, and ever more certain of God's love and power in my life. Much more than I'd bargained for with the price of my ticket.

God moves with grace in and through our lives all the time. Grace- and our faith that God will turn up- is what changes us; we are Shaped by Faith.

We are about to celebrate one of the moments in which God gave us a gift for all time- the gift of our Savior, Jesus. Jesus came as a small baby but filled with the grace of God- grace to teach, shape, and save us.

My Christmas prayer for each of you is that you will experience God's love this season- in little ways that will continue to work on you, in you, to shape you in faithfulness, as God's beloved.

A holy Christmas to you all as we welcome the babe Jesus, God's gift of love for us.

+Audrey

The Rt. Rev. Audrey C. Scanlan
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