

Rev. Wayne Walder

I have always defined graciousness as being filled with grace. We see a graceful skater and we can't look away. We see a graceful act of kindness and we are moved. We hear sounds, that together, become a graceful music to our ears. Being gracious stops time in a sense. It is a lovely benefit of being mindful.

I bet you have felt grace at some time in your life. It could have been at the birth of a child, the compassionate death of a loved one, nature's display of a perfect day, falling in love. We have all felt the wonderful feeling of being filled with grace. Grace is about being glad to be alive, and it includes pleasure and delight. It is hard to describe with words and it is certainly hard to predict. Within grace there is humility, respect and kindness.

George Sanders, wrote in the New Yorker Magazine, "I feel corny when I say it, and I don't know what to do with that feeling, but what I regret most in my life is when I am not gracious". He called it his failure of kindness, his failure to become his best self.

Maybe we have all failed at grace and kindness. I can easily recount the failures of kindness and grace in my own life. There are the times I never responded to an email, a simple gracelessness. The times I was too busy to acknowledge and accept fragile people who approached me, graceless. The times when I was so busy preparing what I wanted to say that I did not listen to what you were saying, graceless. There are times I have I offered advice that was unwelcome, and times when I man-splained out of arrogance and ignorance. Graceless.

Graciousness is more than any simple act, it is a curious combination of allowing life to flow through you and at the same time, aiming it so it touches others. Someone sent me a gracious request this week, they asked if I would be willing to spend time in a hospital with them and offered all sorts of ways I could

decline. Joan offered me cookies in a little plastic bag, she put on my car seat. Another gave me an unexpected compliment for some pictures I have up at a gallery. Another offered an real apology. Graciousness is wonderful to give and wonderful to receive... Allowing life to flow through you allows you to feel good. And since life is flowing through us as grace, there are no strings attached.

I have been trying to be more graceful, over the years. Instead of being filled with my internal dialogue, instead of being filled with my to do list, instead of being on point or logically getting things done.... I am also trying to watch for moments where I can be graceful or at least gracious. And I have had a little success.

I started with some simple words. Has anyone ever said to you, ....tell me more..... Have you ever said them? Maybe someone was explaining an idea, or telling a story about a time in their life, you paused.... and said.... tell me more..... Tell me more..... And they did...

These are magic words of gracefulness. Whenever someone says,... tell me more, I am initially taken aback, and incrementally, my heart opens. If I am any judge, so too does the heart of the person saying them. Those words are magic words. When we hear them we know, tell me more.... someone actually means it. They want to listen to us, care for us, and take what we say seriously.

Can I gracefully and respectfully ask you to Try it. When you feel a good conversation could go deeper but you are not sure how to guide it deeper, or when you want to know more of what they want to tell you, but don't know how to ask, say the magic words, tell me more.....the graceful words, tell me more.

Can I be corny and ask you to try it with me.....Tell me more.

There are other sets of graceful, magic words. I have not heard these too often, .... I'm sorry, what can I do to make it right?..... I do not think I have heard this expression more than 5 times in my entire life. I'm sorry, What can I do to make it right... Not just the expected "I'm sorry", or the flippant, "Sorry", or the arrogant, "I'm sorry you got hurt". Think about what it would mean to you if someone who had wronged you said, I am so sorry, what can I do to make it right? We would have to stop our internal dialogue and think about a few things. We might say to ourselves wow this person really "is" sorry. We might ask for a simple act of restoring trust, or just having them say it might be enough.... How can I make it better.

In the Jewish tradition an apology requires three things, the apology, the request to make thing right and the promise to never do it again. But I would be happy with I'm sorry, how can I make it right. Has anyone ever had this said to them in this room?

The last set of magic words I'll mention is .....Can I help you.....These words are different from the clerk who says, can I help you, meaning can I sell you something. They are different from.... I know where you can get help, and different from ...you are gonna need some help, or you look helpless. Can I help you, is a personal an intimate offer of grace. A way of saying.... I want to be part of your struggle, which is of course, wanting to be part of your life. Have you even been made more complete by someone saying, "can I help you".

Tell me more.....I'm sorry, what can I do to make it right.....Can I help you. These words are filled with grace and when we use them, they make us gracious, they make us graceful. They are magic.

These words change not only what we think, but the way we think. They are not easy because they require that we stop thinking about ourselves. I don't know about you but I operate selfishly most of the time. By selfish I mean

staying in my own world. Working for my self. Not straying from my comfort zone.

Yet intellectually I know that the most important things in life are moments of grace. Moments when we are connected. Moments when we are in love with life. Being graceful in these simple ways and I bet you know 100 more, helps us feel connected as the mystics and scientists tell us we should be.

Theologian Martin Bubers puts this so simply. Buber said, stop treating people like “things” serving you. Stop manipulating people to get your way. Instead he said, treat them like guests, like the god or the goddess is visiting you.

If you see someone as a fragile and imperfect goddess, or as a flawed and fallible god, can you say.....How can I Help? I’m sorry, what can I do to make it right? Tell me more?..... When we stop our inner dialogue and treat each other well, it become easier to do what Buber asks of us.

When we sit together with our friend, our brother, our sister, our lover, our child, and take a breath and experience this moment, (mindfulness) and know we are all guests on this planet, Its easier to use those magic words. I bet you know or will discover some magic words of your own too.

I was sitting with someone in the hospital this week and I said to them, tell me more. And they did, more than I imagined. And while they spoke I saw their face more closely. I heard the timber of their voice more accurately. By letting go of myself, I was offered the opportunity to become more graceful, and that is in its own way, is one of the most magical things we can ever do.