

## Grace and Forgiveness (Rev. Robert Heffernan)

I am becoming increasingly concerned with the level of intolerance these days. Regardless of your position on certain social issues, economic policies, political dispositions, or belief systems, it seems to me that our ability to tolerate those who differ from us is less than ideal. We can be quick to judge, fast to speak, slow to listen, (if at all), and overall less empathetic to the plights of those around us.

I am not saying that we all have to agree with each other on everything, but that we should be able to respectfully disagree on many things and still live together peacefully both in action and discourse. Now I realize this is an odd statement to make, given our emphasis on acceptance and diversity that permeates the landscape, but practically I think we are more divided as communities than we would like to admit. Does not the very fact that we have to keep emphasizing acceptance not presume what I just said to be true, at least to a degree?

But why the intolerance, and even hate? Well, if what I just said has even an ounce of truth to it, the answer is certainly far more complex than I can fully answer. However, I can insert two words into the public square that if lived out can and has changed families and communities: **Grace and Forgiveness**. Living out these two truths is critical for true unity in any community. We cannot change everyone, but, starting in our own homes and relationships we can be more gracious and forgiving.

Grace is one of the most important concepts in Christianity, and I would argue for the world to embrace. Without it we become quickly inhumane. Just read a history book covering the events of the last century to support that point. In the Bible, grace is God's unconditional love bestowed upon undeserving people. It is most clearly expressed in the life of Jesus Christ of Nazareth who forgave greedy rich people, the sexually promiscuous, religious Zealots, etc. He taught that everyone needs it from God and should receive it through faith in Him. And then everyone is asked to extend that received grace to others. Grace is the balm that can heal us, all of us, because at its heart is forgiveness.

To forgive someone is to extend grace to them. It implies that even though they wronged you, and perhaps unjustly so, that you are willing to release them from blame or judgment and put it in God's hands. When you forgive you start to see that you are no better than them, just as imperfect and broken as they are.

And as you forgive, you are set free. You don't have to be the judge you never were; and you are able to live again. By forgiving, you can love your neighbor instead of living in fear of them and the intolerance that stems from it.