



Never Take It For Granted



A Sermon By
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Grace Episcopal Church
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<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/2017-10-15-AWW.mp3>.

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Stewardship Sunday
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Not long ago, I read a book by Nora Ephron, who was the creative genius behind highly successful movies like *You've Got Mail* and *When Harry Met Sally*. The book was a collection of essays written shortly before Ephron's death, and of all of the essays in the book, the one that really made an impression on me was called, "What I Will Miss." As the title suggests, the essay was basically a list of all those things Ephron would miss after she was gone, and while you might think it was full of the special people and places from Ephron's life, the list was actually quite ordinary and mundane. It contained many of the little things from everyday life, things we experience but barely notice or appreciate, things we often take for granted, but in the big scheme, make everything all worthwhile, things like: waffles with maple syrup; taking a walk in the park; reading in bed; fireworks; laughing; the leaves changing color; the twinkling lights of a Christmas Tree.

I was remembering Ephron's essay recently, because, in light of the hurricanes, and the shooting in Las Vegas, and the wildfires in Northern California, I was thinking of the things that I take for granted: electricity, a hot shower, food, water, a roof over my head. For some reason, it's only when life is called into question that we pause to reflect on what's really important. The rest of the time we get so caught up in our busy lives we don't stop to look around, breath it all in and treasure what we have.

And, that's too bad, because we all have so much for which to be thankful, so we should make the time to appreciate those things and cherish those things.

What is it in life that you often take for granted?

One item that that belongs on all of our lists is our relationship with God. Even the most faithful people, the most devoted people, can fail to appreciate God's presence in their life.

In the Old Testament, for example, the people of Israel shared a special relationship with God. It began when God established a covenant with Abraham, and it continued for generations, through Isaac, and Jacob and Joseph. When God led the people of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt, God wanted to recommit to the covenant, so God called Moses to the top of Mount Sinai, where God instructed Moses on how the Israelites should live and worship, and where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments.

But, while Moses was away, the people of Israel became anxious and worried. Moses was gone for forty days and forty nights, and the Israelites didn't know what had become of him. Their minds were full with questions and doubt, and so the people of Israel decided to make themselves another god, one they could see, and feel, and touch. Dismissing everything God had done for them, and putting aside the covenant that was so central to their identity, the Israelites took their gold jewelry, melted in down and cast the image of a calf.

As Psalm 106 says:

*And so they exchanged their Glory *
for the image of an ox that feeds on grass.
They forgot God their Savior, *
who had done great things in Egypt.*

We all forget about God sometimes, even the most faithful of us. We put other things before God. We cast our own idols of money, position, outward appearances and reputation. We cling to those idols, rather than to God, that is, right up until the moment when we need God for something, and then, we go

running to God with a long wish-list of prayers of how we want God to change something, or fix something, of how we want God to help us, and to help us right now, even though we haven't paid much attention to God, haven't really focused on God, rarely taken a moment to ask what we can do for God.

In other words, we take God for granted.

The late author, David Foster Wallace, made this very point in what is considered, by many, to be the best commencement address of all time. Delivered at Kenyon College, just a few years before Nora Ephron's book was published, Wallace urged the graduates to be conscious of how they were living. He told them:

Here's something else that's weird but true: in the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship... If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough. It's the truth. Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you...

Worship power, you will end up feeling weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to numb you to your own fear. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. But the insidious thing about these forms of worship is not that they're evil or sinful, it's that they're unconscious. They are default settings.

If Wallace is right and worshipping false idols is our default setting, then stewardship, good stewardship, is our theological reset button. Stewardship begins with appreciation, and it grows out of gratitude. God has blessed every one of us has been in many different ways, and it is important for us to be conscious of those blessings and say "thank you" to God, just as we say "thank you" to anyone else. We do that by giving back to God, taking some of what God has given us and putting it back to use for God's work in the world. We thank God by sharing our blessings, offering them to the service of others and the advancement of God's kingdom. At its heart, stewardship is an understanding that everything we are, everything we have, and everything that surrounds us comes from God. God just lets us borrow it for a while.

One of the great blessings in my life is being part of this church community, and I know that is true for many of you, a well. I have said it before, and I'll say it again: This is not just a good church; This is not just a great church; This is an incredible church! There are very few places like this. We are so fortunate to part of a community that is truly alive with the Holy Spirit. While many churches around the country are struggling, Grace Church is healthy and vibrant. We continually have newcomers walking through our doors, attracted by our diversity, and worship, and music, and the warm welcome that we extend to everyone, no matter who they are. We have learning and fellowship opportunities for people of all ages, from Sunday School through Strolling Seniors. We are committed to working for racial justice, and in the near future, we are hoping to welcome a refugee family from another country. The list goes on and on and on. What we do here is unbelievable!

But, what makes Grace Church really special, what sets us apart from so many other churches, is all of you. Each and every one of you makes Grace Church. You make it all possible. You make it happen. You make this place what it is.

May we never take it for granted.

Amen.