

PARISH HOUSE

Newmarket Church of Christ



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UNEXPECTED GRACE

Nathan Pickard

I'm spending some time reading Jack Reese's new book, *Grace, Sideways*. The opening words to the introduction are worth repeating:

Faith never rises from the soil whole. It pushes upward, seed to bud to fruit, through setbacks and seasons, in innocence when the questions are gentle and the answers safe, in the wonder of prayers fulfilled, in the uneasy waiting when hearts crave any answer at all, through confessions laid bare to the dark, in hope that lifts its face to the morning. Faith is a mongrel. It is mixed, blended, crossbred, full of counterforces and contrasts, seeking wholeness, seeking light (pg. 1)

Wanted . . .

Parish House Minister

The Newmarket Church of Christ has intentionally lived with her neighbours for the past 15+ years. We are now looking for a Parish House minister who will (but not limited to):

- Build upon and strengthen the established ministries and friendships within the neighbourhood,
- Live with and for our neighbours
- Continue to help us live deeper into the mission of God

Those interested to apply and/or to seek more information, please contact newmarketcofc@gmail.com.

A full job description can be found at:
<https://www.newmarketchurchofchrist.ca/parish-house>

Orthodoxy & Worship

Orthodoxy is right belief/doctrine. Is there a relationship between orthodoxy and worship? Every worshipping community has a liturgy (an order of worship). What's the relationship between the two? Is there a relationship? I think there is. I think liturgy shapes one's orthodoxy and one's orthodoxy shapes one's liturgy. If this is true, it's safe to say that worship shapes our belief/doctrine, and therefore, it matters what happens in worship.

Let's take the sharing of bread and wine in worship. Each Sunday we hear the words, "Welcome to the Table." Why do we speak these words each Sunday? Because this is a table where God invites us to a feast of forgiveness, mercy, grace. At the Table we "remember" Jesus. What are we remembering? We remember how he healed the lepers, caused the blind to see. We remember his death. We remember his resurrection and how resurrection destroys the power of death.

If each week we hear the words, "Welcome to the Table" or we hear similar words such as, "God welcomes us to this Table of forgiveness and mercy," how does this form us? How does the Table shape us? How does hearing these words shape our belief and doctrine about God and God's relationship with the world?

I am convinced that what happens in worship, specifically what happens at the Table matters, for worship shapes our belief and doctrines of God who welcomes us to a Table.



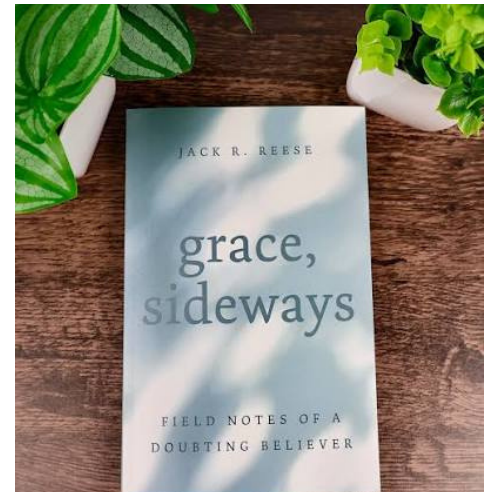
Unexpected Grace, Cont'd

I want to believe that the seeds of faith that were planted by my parents, grandparents and the church I grew up so many years ago have begun to sprout and to bear fruit. What though, I wonder, has the seeds of faith had to push through? Not all seeds that are planted will sprout and grow fruit. Not enough rain, too much sun, maybe a herbicide has been sprayed that will kill the emerging plants, and maybe, just maybe there has been no cross-pollination that some plants need in order to bear fruit. If the seeds of faith planted in our lives and our churches are emerging to bear fruit, what have been the challenges and the setbacks to our faith emerging out of the soil?

Continuing to read through the book, *Grace, Sideways*, I read of a time when in the pursuit of higher education for a position in Christian ministry, there was a moment in time where Reese lacked motivation and willpower to continue. Seeking a diversion, Reese started reading C.S. Lewis semi-autobiography, *Surprised By Joy*. In this work of writing, Lewis confesses that the harder he worked at finding hints of the divine, the rarer it became in his life and as a result, he began to believe he would never experience it again. But as Lewis discovered, hints of the divine came at him in unexpected ways through unexpected people. Reflecting on this, Reese writes, "The greatest surprise may be that the God who sees us rarely comes at us head-on and seldom when we're looking" (pg. 60). Grace comes at us from the side.

Kevin and I are leading some interviews. We're trying to understand how the neighbourhood and the church are changing, while at the same time, sniff out the work of God in our midst. As we were sitting outside near the community garden, our conversation with some interviewees led us to ask the question, "How did you come to be a part of this church?" Without hesitation, some of them answered, "Kenny."

We were caught off guard. We were not expecting that. We inquired more and the responses were something like, "We met Kenny and Kenny told us about this church and invited us."



I met Kenny unexpectedly. He wasn't looking for God or for Christian community. He was looking for someone to bury his mother who recently died. He walked into the coffee shop and loudly said to everyone, "Anyone know a priest. I need to bury my mother." A few locals looked up and said, "Talk to that guy over there." Kenny walked over and said, "You a priest? I need to bury my mom." Not too long afterwards, we stood together in the cemetery. That Sunday Kenny showed up at church. A couple of years later, Kenny walked through the waters of baptism. The grace of God did not come at Kenny head-on; it came at him sideways, in unexpected ways. Unexpected grace.

Or take the story of Abraham. Abraham and his wife Sarah are childless and face a future without heirs. While sitting under some oak trees, three strangers meet Abraham. Abraham offers them hospitality, the gift of food and a place to rest their bodies. Before the guests leave, they tell Abraham that in due time, Sarah will give birth to a child. Unexpected grace.

Or take the story of Peter after the crucifixion of Jesus. Peter has denied Jesus and never had a chance to ask forgiveness from Jesus before Jesus death. Peter and others go fishing and in the early morning hours, after fishing all night and catching nothing, a figure stands on the beach and ask, *"Caught anything?" "Nothing." "Try the other side."* So Peter and his colleagues did. They caught an abundant amount of fish. Recognizing it's Jesus, Peter jumps overboard and swims to shore where Jesus meets Peter at a charcoal fire. Unexpected grace.

As the seeds of faith continue to emerge out of the soil in which they have been planted, faith will not arrive whole. It will take time. There will be setbacks. There will be obstacles. There will be a need for the right amount of moisture and sun. There might even need to be some cross-pollination taking place. And we must not forget, there needs to be the grace of God that arrives in our lives in the unexpected moments.

I'm starting to think Paul's benediction to the Corinthian church is making more sense: *"May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you"* (2 Corinthians 13:14). May the grace of God be present in our lives so that the seeds of faith that have been planted can emerge out of the soil.

A Neighbourhood BBQ

Twice a year we host a neighbourhood BBQ following our worship service. It's a combined effort. Many of our neighbours pitch in. They bring food. They tend to the BBQ. They work hard alongside the church. Grateful that the church and neighbourhood are able to share table fellowship together.



"To be most effective in bringing about change in a community or a neighborhood, it helps if you live there."

Larry James, *The Wealth of the poor*

**NEWMARKET
CHURCH OF
CHRIST**

Sharing the kingdom of
God through friendship
with the neighbourhood

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