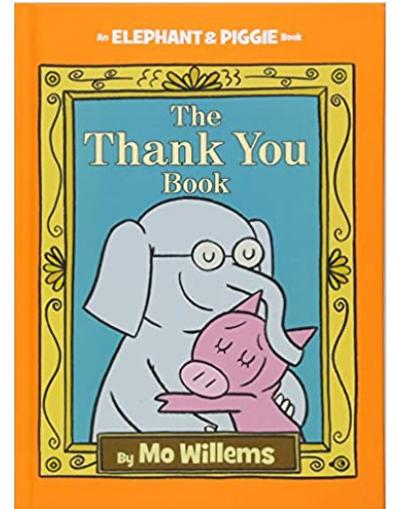


Text: Ephesians 2:1-10  
Title: Growing in Grace  
Date: 19 September 2021  
Series: Experiencing the Fullness of God  
For: Community CRC, Kitchener, ON  
By: Rev. Amanda C. Bakale

Who is familiar with the Elephant and Piggie books?

If you're a young kid or a family with young kids you probably have one of their books on the floor somewhere near you. And if you're an aunt or uncle, grandparent or anyone who has the joy of having kiddos in your life, well, you'll know the antics of this early-reader book with its anxiety-prone, trumpet-playing, ice-cream loving Elephant Gerald and the small in stature, sunny, slop-loving Piggie and the joy of their friendship.

Jakob's current favourite is **The Thank You Book**. (And I have permission from him to bring favourite one with me this morning). At the start of the book, Piggie thinks that she's a pretty lucky pig and decides to go around thanking everyone in her life. But Gerald, ever the pessimist, tells her that she'll forget someone. Piggie, the eternal optimist, insists that she will thank everyone.



So as the reader we follow Piggie around as she thanks everyone who has made an appearance in one of their stories: the Squirrels, the Snake, the Pigeon, Mouse and Birdies, Rhino and Rhino's Big Sister, Barky Dog and Pelican, Bear and Hippo, Whale and Brian Bat, Ice Cream Penguin and Doctor Cat, even the Flies and Worms. And at the end of this very long list, Gerald is right by her side:

"You are forgetting someone! Someone VERY Important."



Thinking Gerald is talking about himself, Piggie gives him a big thanks for being her best friend, but Gerald still says she's forgetting someone. Someone very important. And for the life of her, she can't think of who it is. Until Gerald points to the person beyond the pages of their book:

Our reader. You forgot to thank our reader.

And the two of them break the fourth wall and together they thank the reader because as they say together:

We could not be 'us' without you.

When we join Paul here in Chapter 2, he has spent an extended part of the letter giving thanks for the Ephesians Christians, for their love for all God's people, for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, for the power of Christ that is at work in the church and throughout the cosmos. It's an extensive list of gratitude to God, to his readers, for, well, quite literally everything.

The part of Paul's letter we read together is a hinge section between Paul's grand section of thanksgiving that begins his letter and the body of the letter that lays out who we are as Christians and how we are to live according to all the good things Paul just got done giving thanks to God for.

Now verses 1-7 are actually one very long sentence in Greek. It's like Paul just couldn't take a breath here or waste space putting in a period or two. The first 7 verses are one long extended thought on the truth of our lives:

### **We were dead.**

Dead in sin. Dead to sin. Dead to God. Dead to each other. Dead dead. Ruled by whatever whim in us and in the world around us. But then God stepped in and gave us life again. Life resurrected. Life lived in response to the mercy, kindness, goodness, and grace of God. We were dead. Now we're alive.

And Paul keeps interjecting, as if he's anxious we'll miss this key point, that this life from death, that's the grace of God. Period. That salvation and rescue from our worst impulses and path of destruction, yeah, that's because of the grace of God. And he repeats himself several times over in this short span of verses:

It is by grace you have been saved.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith.

And that faith, yep, that wasn't your doing, it was, that's right, grace again - the gift of God.

Paul keep interjecting and interjecting just like Gerald to Piggie:

You're inclined to forget someone.

Don't forget someone very important.

The most important someone.

**And it's a pretty accurate pastoral concern on Paul's part, because we're inclined to forget to thank the most important Someone.**

While we know to sing about grace and talk about grace as Christians, we not particularly inclined to really believe that we need grace.

I mean, sure, other people do - the people who *really* need God's grace. Those who are *really* dead in their transgressions and sins. [Insert your own list of people who you think are worse than you.] And by comparison, you convince yourself you haven't really done anything that bad.

Except Paul doesn't make room for that kind of separation. You were all dead. Period. Not half alive. Or semi-comatose. Dead dead.

And, like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

And if that sounds a little harsh, there's an image from Augustine and the early church that was picked up, especially by Martin Luther, and has endured through centuries of the church. An image for how to explain our natural state as humans.

In Latin it's *incurvatus in se*

In English it means to be turned or curved inward on oneself.

Our natural state, our fallen human nature, is to be so curved inward toward our own self that we can't see God or others, let alone reach out toward them.

Our selfishness, our self-interest, our self-consciousness, our selfish desires and whims and wants that harm others. It all leads us on a path of self-destruction. Leaving us dead to others and to God.

And that's our default nature. That's who we are apart from the grace of God.

And Paul knows that even when it comes to our own relationship with God, we find it hard to shake old habits and our old sinful self and we want to take some credit for God's rescue of us. To justify our boast that we were just a little bit better than someone else. That we deserve God's love more than those people. [Again, insert list of people who you think are worse than you.] Which is why he interjects again and again:

It is by grace you have been saved.  
Only by the grace, the gift of God.

Which is Paul's way of saying,

Don't forget to thank the Most Important Someone.  
Look out beyond the pages of your story.  
Remember that we could not be 'us' without him.

**We all need to learn to say thank you.**

As kids we have it drilled into us from a young age. Always being reminded to say thank-you. For gifts we receive. For kindness done to us. For our brother or sister passing the potatoes at dinner time. For little things and for big things.

We're told over and over again: Remember to say thank you.

And no matter how old we get, maybe especially as we get older, we all need to learn and relearn how to say thank you.

The practice of saying thank-you for little things and for big things, for gifts received and kindness done to us, works to undo our focus on ourselves, our curved inwardness, and to reach out with appreciation and gratitude to those around us. And that's a mark of growing up - moving from a self-focused existence to an others-focused reality. And that's no different in the spiritual life.

**Worship and our life together as the church is a school of gratitude where the Spirit shapes us to look beyond the pages of our daily lives and remember that we could not be us without the God who lavishes his grace on us.**

At the baptismal font, God gives us the gift of belonging and love, of family and being known. And as the people of God, we say Thanks be to God.

At the pulpit, God speaks to us through the gift of God's Word and Story that reminds us of who we are and who God is for us. And as the people of God, we say Thanks be to God.

At the table, God sets a feast and invites us to dinner to nourish us with the body and blood of our Lord Jesus. The gifts of God for the People of God. And as the people of God, we say Thanks be to God.

Paul's pastoral prayer, as Pastor Tom shared last week, is for the church to be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. And that starts here.

With a simple and honest word of thanks to the God who has made us alive in Jesus Christ, who is rich in mercy and kindness, who does not leave us curved inward on ourselves, dead to God and dead to each other, but raises us up in the power of the resurrection life of Jesus to be a people of grace.

A people who know how to look beyond the pages of their stories to say, "Thanks be to God!"