

A Circle of Grace

Genesis 1:26-31

September 4, 2016

Raise your hands above your head and then
bring your arms slowly down
keeping them outstretched.
Extending your arms in front of you
and then behind you
embrace all of the space around you
knowing that God is in this space with you.
Then slowly reach down to your feet.
This is your Circle of Grace.
You are in it

What would happen if every morning when we woke up, we each would recite this and perform those actions? Would we have a better sense that we are loved? That God accompanies us throughout our day? Would we love ourselves better and more completely and more graciously?

This simple, yet profound action lies at the heart of grace—the grace we extend to ourselves, the grace we extend to others, and the grace God extends to us. This is the grace that also lies at the heart of the Genesis account of creation. From the moment God spoke light into being, and separated the day from the night, until the moment when God created humankind in God’s image, the grace and mercy of God have been the heartbeat of this world. God’s very being is life and light and love and grace, and as beings created in God’s image, that is the heartbeat that surrounds us and continues to give us life.

At each step of creation, in response to what was created, God declared it all good. Creation, from the stars and sun to the plants and animals, is created good. And the pinnacle of creation is the creation of human beings in the image of God. It is here that creation is declared very good. What happens on the 6th day in creating human beings in God’s image, is that they are created for relationship—with God and other humans—so that they can have dominion over creation, functioning as God’s representatives on earth, tending creation with care and love, as God would tend it.

(https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1079)

To be made in the image of God is an awesome thing. To be image-bearers of God is a sacred task. I suspect we don't think about what this truly means; if we lived into this image, it could have a huge impact on how we love ourselves and others.

That is what lies behind this profound act, this Circle of Grace created by our arms. It is the understanding at the deepest level that each person is created in the image of God and dearly and deeply loved for who they are.

The Circle of Grace verse and actions are part of a curriculum put out by Dove's Nest, an organization whose goal is the safety of children and youth. Dove's Nest exists as a resource to the church, and teaches children from preschool until the end of high school, that they are loved by God, they are created in the image of God, and that God is always with them. Dove's Nest wants children to grow up attuned to God's presence in every moment of their lives; they desire the well-being and safety of all children and youth; they want them to grow up recognizing their Circle of Grace and knowing that when all is right and good, they will feel comfortable and safe and at peace. They also want children to recognize when they do not feel comfortable and safe and at peace, and to identify those feelings as promptings from the Holy Spirit that something is in their Circle of Grace which does not belong there. The Circle of Grace curriculum also helps children recognize the trusted adults to whom they can go to talk about what doesn't belong in their circle of grace.

This curriculum is available to all MC USA congregations, and we will work toward incorporating it into our Sunday school program here at Berkey. During the past year, the Caring Team—now to be called the Safe Church Caring Team, along with Caregiving Commission have worked on updating our Sexual Harassment and Abuse policy and Christian Education Commission has worked on developing a Child and Youth Protection Policy. Both of these are ready for the next level of approval, and will come to the congregation for your final approval at the November congregational meeting. The Circle of Grace curriculum is part of our strategy of being a safe place for our children and youth and our overall desire to be a place of safety and support for all people.

While the curriculum is aimed at children and youth, we recognize that all of us need to be reminded of our own circle of grace. We each need to regularly remember that we are created in God's image; we are loved by God; and God is

with us always. It doesn't matter what mood we are in, whether we are happy or sad, hopeful or despairing, God's presence surrounds us and meets us in each of these moments. God's desire for each one of us is that we live fully and completely in God's love and grace.

This doesn't mean we won't be hurt or experience difficulties; those happen, but God doesn't cause them or desire them for us. God promises to be with us in the midst of them, to provide comfort and strength for us. God's desire is our healing and wholeness.

I think one of the brilliant parts of the Circle of Grace curriculum is the teaching and encouragement for children to pay attention to their guts, their feelings, the inner voice that tells them when something isn't as it should be, and to identify that as the Holy Spirit's voice and presence. We all have that inner voice, that internal compass that tells us things, but we haven't always felt permission to pay attention to it, nor to talk about it. Most of us have learned over time to ignore it; to push it aside. If we start raising generations of children who honour their internal voice and compass, and are empowered to put it into words, the church, our community and our world will be a better place.

God wants each of us to be safe; to live lives that are full of love and grace; God gives us trusted people in whom we can confide and to whom we can turn for comfort and help. God loves each of us fully and completely. In God's love, we are safe.

I invite you to stand and we'll make our circle of Grace together:

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keeping them outstretched.
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and then behind you
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You are deeply loved and accompanied by God. May you know this to be true.