

## Living Through Grace, Living on Gifts

When I was thirty years old I resigned from my job as a preschool teacher. Salary, retirement, paid vacations, savings account, health insurance, sick leave—all hung up like an old worn coat. I stepped out, out into what appeared to be thin air. I needed something more than the usual. What I had thought would be a move to a more interesting way of making a living became a practice of faith and hope.

Imagine that you had a particular passion that made you different in the way you considered parts of life. Not so unusual really. Now picture using that passion to focus and hone your abilities in a way that insists on improving yourself, your surroundings, and the lives you come in contact with. Still not so out of the ordinary. Now bring in an element of being paid—not necessarily by the people you serve, but by people who see and understand that your work is important. And instead of being paid per task, you are paid as people are moved. This is the thin air part. Not because there is nothing there, but because the culture teaches us that there is not enough.

When we bring the essence of our best understanding and effort forward, our measure of the inner Light glows brighter and longer. We come to know a center of who we are, Divine connection, our individual worth and the possible value of corporate effort. What we know and what we are still learning becomes clearer. What fills us with excitement and what bores us to tears becomes amazingly real. What are the cultural systems and traditions that encourage this dynamic, this simple ideal of how to be in the world? And what cultural traditions wilt this spirit of knowing the self?

Money is itself one of those topics such as evil, sex, or violence, which is so private and pervasive that we are never certain if we have received a proper education about them or what a proper education might look like. So let's sidestep as much cultural baggage as possible and say that money is a vehicle for offering more choice. And like anything that has power, it must be used carefully.

People have always supported good works in many ways, and I have entered that tradition. When I receive a gift of money, I know that it's because someone has recognized my riches and understands that I am sharing them. It's a way of joining me and giving a push to a work they want to see continue. If people gave

me money because I was poor, I would only experience myself as I was seen, as only needy. My sense of myself begins with my connection to the Divine. The messages, the opportunities, the strength are all blessings that come forward, invited and not. My primary task is surrender, surrender of disbelief including fear and doubt. The listening to what is being asked of me for my own healing as well as others follows this immediately. Surrender and listening over and over, then sometimes action is the overall pattern. Some of what is presented is to inform me of what I cannot help, an abiding humility to tether my reckless heart.

My gift for releasing pain is inconstant. I do not choose when or to whom the gift is given. The faith to say yes and the faith to say no are the same on the inside. One hopes that it can be seen and understood on the outside. My dedication to the work is not inconstant, and my ability to be ready increases with each year of practice.

There is a small dance that is done to balance two forces. On the one hand, the work, in my understanding, is intimate and needs to be kept low to the ground. Intimate work is easily misunderstood or misinterpreted the larger the group one works with. So there is some need to be able to watch and see if each one participating in healing work is engaging similar understandings and experience of unfolding. On the other hand, there is some need for enough people to see the work and appreciate its importance to support the work prayerfully and financially. I think of this dance as not pushing the river, while watching for currents of clarity and kindness that will carry us farther along.

There are lots of ways to get off the path and generally one way to get back on—go back to basics. Follow your disciplines and do good work. Support will change as the work does and as we grow with the work. As we learn to be graceful in our own dance between hope and fear, our support from others will reflect that grace.