

From our Churches

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Imperfections and Grace Refined Through Fire

- 1 As you've been listening you may have become aware of something in your life that you'd like to "let go" of. It might be a style of responding to conflict. You might want to let go of being a skunk, spraying others and the environment with your own displeasure.
- 2 You might want to let go of being a turtle, denying conflict or stuffing it inside you. You might want to let go of expecting people to be a certain way just because they come from a certain family.
- 1 You might want to let go of expecting a particular person to change before you will accept them.
- 2 Or you might want to let go of your response to someone who always gets your goat, and find a more creative, life-giving response.
- 1 Maybe you want to let go of and be freed from a particular incident from the past, involving the church, its leaders or particular individuals.
- 2 Perhaps you've been hurt in the past, and want to find healing.
- 1 Maybe you are living with feelings of guilt because you know you've hurt someone.
- 2 Or maybe it's something else altogether...
- 1 this morning, all of us will have the opportunity to decide to "let go", to "unhook" and to embrace God's grace for our lives as individuals and as a congregation. Now "letting go" isn't always easy. It's not just snapping your fingers and, poof, it's gone. We can't do it on our own. We need God's help, and often the help of other people. But making the decision to "let go" and to claim God's grace is an important first step. It may be that we'll need to do some more work, to talk to someone—a pastor or a trusted friend. If you'd like help in facing these issues, we are willing to meet with you.

- 2 It might be that we need to confront someone, lovingly and caringly, and let them know that we've been hurt and that we want to seek reconciliation.
- 1 It may be that we need to confess, that we have made a mistake, we've gotten caught in a bad pattern or situation, we've sinned and need to ask forgiveness.
- 2 In some cases, we need to recognize that we've come through a hard time, now it's past and though the sadness lingers, we want to go on in God's grace.

REFINED THROUGH FIRE

- 1 The Bible uses the image of a refining fire several times. The prophet Zechariah speaks of God's treatment of the Israelite exiles in this way;
- Zech. 13:9 "...I will put this third into the fire and refine them as one refines silver and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them. I will say "they are my people"; and they will say, "the LORD is our God."*
- 2 Today we are affirming that "We are God's people" and that "the LORD is our God." WE want to be built up together in love and grow into Christ, our head.
- 1 In the refining fire, impurities that make the metal weak, and dross that hides the beauty of the silver or gold are burnt away. What is left is stronger. What remains is more beautiful.
- 2 We confess that even though we are the people of God, even though we have much to celebrate [on our 150th anniversary], our lives can use constant refining and purifying.

We want to recognize this by participating in a symbolic act.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 In a few moments, the ushers will distribute slips of paper, and each one of us will be given the opportunity to write a word or two indicating something we want to "let go of", so we can more fully embrace God's grace.
- 2 These slips will be collected and given over to God. No one will read them. What is written will simply be between you and God.

CONCLUSION

- 1 As we sing the hymn, *Marvelous Grace of Our Loving Lord*, let God call something to mind, that you would like to let go of.

INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE DISTRIBUTION

- 2 The ushers will now pass slips of paper down each pew. We invite each one of us to take a slip and write a word or two describing what you would like to release to God. You may choose to leave it blank, thinking rather than writing. After a few moments, the ushers will pass baskets to collect the slips. In the spirit of “building each other up”, we ask everyone to return their paper, so that your neighbors in the pew do not feel singled out.

[Ushers bring baskets forward and empty them into a large wooden bowl held by the Chairperson of the Elders.]

- Let us pray:

God our healer, your mercy is like a refining fire, you confront us in tenderness, you burn away the dross so that we your people may be stronger and more beautiful.

We release to you now those things we have written and not dared to write, those things we have thought and hardly dared to think...

In your mercy, accept what we have written and thought.

Assure us of your forgiveness and your healing.

Where we need to take some next steps, give us the courage to do so, and the wisdom to know how.

Where we simply need to let go, enable us to do so.

Assure each of us of your steadfast love, which never abandons us...which endures forever...

Assure us that your grace has brought us safe thus far, and your grace will lead us on. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

- The service will continue in two places—just outside the foyer door and here in the auditorium. You are welcome to witness the burning of these papers by standing in the lower foyer or by coming along outside. Or, you are welcome to stay here in the auditorium for the hymn, *Amazing Grace* and some moments of silence.
- The readers return to the back of the auditorium, to close the service for those who have gone along outside, and for those who are staying in here.
- Chairperson of Elders leads procession down centre aisle with bowl of paper, followed by the pastors. Outside, pastors burn the papers in a drum, while congregation is singing *Amazing Grace* inside or watching outside.