
All is Gift

**An article for *The Cathedral Times*
by the Rev. Canon Cathy Zappa, Canon for Liturgy and Pastoral Care**

"All is gift." That's what Bishop Anne Dyer told me before I visited her diocese, the Scottish Episcopal Diocese of Aberdeen and Orkney. She had invited me to spend some sabbatical time there, provided me with a place to stay, and introduced me to two diocesan priests who were as gracious as she was—all before I left Atlanta. What hospitality! What generosity! Of course, I wanted to earn it, or at least return it. "But what do you want me to *do*?" I asked, again and again before coming, almost in desperation. "How can I help *you*?" "All is gift," she answered.

That sounds a lot like grace, doesn't it? But here's the thing about grace: it can be hard to believe sometimes. It can be hard to receive. It can be hard to trust in and depend on grace, whether the grace of God, or the grace of others. "Better to stay in control," fear and pride tell us. "Better to depend on myself, to be beholden to no one, and to prepare and plan and worry."

That is exactly what I did, or at least, *tried* to do. I studied up on everything I could, so that I could avoid asking dumb questions or looking like the foreigner that I was. I packed everything I might need, including the six books I intended to read. I brought plans and expectations and assumptions about sabbatical, ministry, church, Scotland. About how I would encounter God. About how productive and useful I would be. Grace sounded lovely, but I didn't intend to need it.

Then I climbed into my rental car and was confronted with the steering wheel on the right side of the car, and with driving on the left side of the road... through busy roundabouts whose rules I clearly did not understand. Despite all my studying and preparing, I needed help! I needed grace!

And it was there. Sometimes on the road, and always in the churches. Time and again, I was welcomed into worship services, coffee hours, conversations, homes, and lives. At St. John's, a kind worshipper noticed that I had picked up the wrong leaflet, discretely brought me the correct one, invited me to stay for coffee, and kept me company at the table. At St. James just down the road, an acquaintance from Bible study invited me for dinner and, over homemade salmon quiche, patiently explained some of the mysteries of Scotland, including roundabout rules. Furthering my Scottish education, Bishop Anne and her husband hosted my family at their house for an evening of "haggis, 'nips, and tatties," along with a rousing game of croquet. (My team won. Twice. Just saying.)

These hosts in Scotland, along with my colleagues here, worked hard to give me the extraordinary gift of rest. All was gift, and I am so grateful. It was humbling, to say the least. And amazing. And quite transformative.

As a preacher, I talk a lot about grace. As Christians, we talk a lot about grace. We want people to know the good news of the grace of God! But our evangelism begins in our own knowing, trusting, and resting in that grace ourselves. That is an *act* of faith.

The Cathedral of St. Philip is an active, lively place. A quick walk through our ministry fair on Homecoming showed that there is a ministry—a way to serve and offer one's gifts—for everyone. But it is also a place of rest. It is also a place where we receive, or learn to receive.

So now it is my turn to welcome. Welcome to the Cathedral of St. Philip! Welcome back! Welcome again and again and again! Come and rest. Come and receive. Come and be nourished, loved, restored, by the grace of God. All is gift.

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