

There is a 200 year old song that in the last 50 years has become a sort of national anthem for the world: "Amazing Grace." How ironic that God would put a hymn extolling His grace on the lips of the whole world. God's grace is His gift to those who do not deserve His forgiveness and love. Note the following true story:

In November of 2004 Victoria Ruvolo was driving home on that cold and rainy day in Long Island NY. Earlier that evening, six young people had broken into a car and stolen a credit card with which they bought \$400 worth of DVDs and video games plus, a 20lb frozen turkey.

Victoria doesn't remember the car heading toward her on the highway, or the teenager hanging out the window. Nor does she remember the frozen turkey he threw at her car that came crashing through her windshield, knocking her unconscious and smashing every bone in her face, leaving her with significant brain damage. Nearly a month later she heard the explanation for the 8 hour surgery that attempted to reconstruct her cave-in face, the four titanium plates supporting her facial bones, the synthetic film holding her eye in place, the tracheotomy and wired jaw. She heard the explanation but couldn't process it.

The young men were caught and all pleaded guilty except one: Ryan Cushing, the 18 year old who had thrown the turkey. In January, 2005, he entered a plea of not guilty. Had he gone to trial and been found guilty he could have been sentenced to a maximum of 25 years in prison. But in August of 2005, with Victoria still undergoing therapy and treatment, she and Ryan Cushing met for the first time. On August 15th, the young man received a plea bargain sentence of 6 months in jail and 5 years of probation, to include psychological therapy and public service. The plea bargain had been at the request of Victoria.

When Ryan and Victoria met for the first time that day in court, she threw her arms around the sobbing youth, stroking his hair, telling him she loved and forgave him, that she wanted the best for his life. The NEW YORK TIMES called the scene a "moment of grace": "Given the opportunity for retribution, Ms. Ruvolo gave and got something better: the dissipation of anger and the restoration of hope, in a gesture as clasping as the tears washing down her damaged face, and the face of the foolish, miserable boy whose life she single-handedly restored."

To say that was a moment of grace is an understatement. At the very least, it was a display of "amazing grace." Wherever grace is displayed, it short-circuits our whole system of reasoning; it turns all our suppositions upside down. Grace is unexpected and underserved and catches us off guard. We think, "Surely there is a part of this story I have not heard." We shake our heads, marvel for a few days or weeks, and eventually return to the routine of our lives.

More next week about the Melody, The Man (author) the Message and the Meaning of Grace & Mercy

See you then