The Story Behind the Song “Amazing Grace”

Friends, welcome to this edition of Cindy’s Corner. My name is Cindy Zalek and I am a Pastoral Associate here at St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Parma, Ohio.

It is so nice of you to tune into this video. Today, I would like to start off with a song that I know is very familiar to you. Everyone loves to sing this song whether it be in church or at another occasion.

I am going to play for you. You will guess the name of the song by the first couple of notes that I play and because you are smart!!!

Okay, here we go. Please feel free to sing away!!!

So what about the history of this song?

Some Facts About the Song:

Written by Englishman John Newton in 1772 based upon a personal experience that he had encountered.

His childhood was anything but ideal. His mother passed away when John was 6 years old.

John Newton himself was a slave trader.

He spent years fighting against authority and deserted the Royal Navy in his twenties.

He was abandoned by his crew in West Africa. This incident forced him to be a servant of a slave trader. He was rescued later on.

When he was returning back to England, a violent storm hit and almost sank the ship. It was at this moment that John had a spiritual conversion of heart, a metanoia (change of heart because of a spiritual experience) John begged God to save all of the members of ship.
When he returned to England, Newton became a slave ship master and held this occupation for many years. Bringing slaves from Africa over to England, he acknowledged that his treatment of slaves was abhorrent.

In 1754, Newton became violently ill on a sea voyage. This illness caused him to abandon his life as a slave trader, the slave trade, and seafaring and devote his life to God’s service.

In 1764, he was ordained as an Anglican priest and became a popular preacher and hymn writer. Out of the many hymns that he wrote, “Amazing Grace,” was one of them.

In his later years, Newton fought to abolish the African slave trade. And so it was that he lived to see the fruits of his labor with the passage of the Slave Trade Act in 1807.

The lyrics of the song,

“I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see,” and “Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come. ‘Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.”

These lyrics carry a much deeper meaning for Newton. Being close to death a couple of times and blind to reality of others made him realize his reliance on God in his life. And also, if I might add, help him to bring closure about his mother’s death who died when he was a little boy.

In modern day times, this song has been used at marches during civil rights movement. It has been sung by many famous singers from Elvis Presley to Aretha Franklin. It continues to be a beloved song sung in churches.
So, how does the story of John Newton relate to our stories today of conversion or a change of heart toward something or someone?

Right now, we are all battling the corona virus together. Many have lost their lives to this disease. Many have lost their jobs and livelihood. Has this time with being inside (Stay At Home) brought us closer to God?

There have been many examples where leaders of the church, Pope Francis for starters, are praying for everyone during this unprecedented time? He is asking for God’s grace and help during this pandemic crisis.

God was with John Newton when he became ill on his sea journeys. And now, God is in the boat with us traveling through uncharted waters during this crisis.

Has this time in history caused us to make a change in our own life, asking God for the grace, the AMAZING GRACE, to change our hearts and minds about something or someone?

According to author Matthew Kelly in his talk on “Holy Moments,” it is important to note that you need God’s grace to create holy moments. He will never deny you the grace you need. It is never God’s grace that is lacking, but rather our willingness to cooperate with his grace.

“How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed.”

May God bless each and everyone one of you this week with AMAZING GRACE!!!

Thank you.
References:

