

THE STORY GOD KEEPS TELLING: WE ARE CALLED



CONNECTIONS
GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

THE CONNECTIONS ONLY GOD CAN MAKE

BY HEATHER JOHNSON

Heather is a member of the Praise Team and has been a member of Grace since 2012.

If I'm being honest, I don't like to wait. When I pray, I often find myself hoping for an immediate answer. I pray for healing and want to see it tomorrow. I pray for guidance and hope the next step becomes obvious. I pray for people I love and long to watch God move right away.

But that's not usually how God works. Some of God's greatest answers to prayer don't arrive in days or even months. Sometimes they take years. Often, we don't recognize that He has been answering our prayers until we look back and see how He was connecting the dots all along. For me, those connections began long before I realized it.

I started playing softball when I was six years old. Looking back, I can see that softball became much more than a game. It became one of the ways God shaped my life. The lessons I learned on the field—perseverance, trust, teamwork, resilience, and discipline—would later become lessons of faith. Back then, youth sports felt different. It was about more than wins and losses. It was about relationships, mentorship, and community.



LOOKING BACK NOW, I CAN SEE THAT GOD WAS PLANTING SEEDS IN
MY HEART LONG BEFORE I UNDERSTOOD WHAT HE WAS DOING.

One day, our coaches invited a group from Athletes in Action to meet with our team. We spent time with young adults who openly shared how they had found faith in Jesus Christ. I don't remember every word they said, but I remember how they made me feel. Their stories stayed with me. Looking back now, I can see that God was planting seeds in my heart long before I understood what He was doing.

Softball has remained a constant throughout my life—as a player, coach, administrator, and mentor. In many ways, it has also become the language God uses to teach me.

One of the most challenging situations in softball is coaching a first-and-third play. There are runners on first and third, and no matter what decision you make, there is risk. Throw behind the runner at first, and the runner on third may steal home. Stay focused on third, and the runner at first may steal second. Successfully defending that play requires preparation, trust, communication, and confidence that every player will do their part.

MOMENTS WHEN ALL I
COULD DO WAS TRUST.
AND EVERY SINGLE
TIME, GOD HAS
PROVEN FAITHFUL.

Life has often felt like a series of first-and-third situations. Moments when there wasn't a perfect answer. Moments when I couldn't control the outcome. Moments when all I could do was trust. And every single time, God has proven faithful. One of those moments involved a former student-athlete.

As a coach and educator, I had the privilege of walking alongside many incredible young people. One student-athlete, in particular, stayed close to my heart. I quietly prayed that one day they would come to know Jesus personally and experience the peace that only He can provide. It wasn't a prayer I talked about often, and there wasn't a dramatic moment when I saw immediate change. I simply trusted that God loved this person even more than I did. Years passed.

Then one day, I learned that this former student-athlete had found faith in Christ. While I had entrusted that prayer to God years before, I had no idea how He was working behind the scenes. Like so many first-and-third situations, I couldn't see the outcome from where I stood. But God already could. He had been working all along.

Another prayer became even more personal. For years, I prayed that God would prepare the heart of someone who loved Him, loved music, and was someone I could one day worship beside. Again, nothing happened overnight.

...I COULDN'T SEE THE OUTCOME FROM WHERE I STOOD.
BUT GOD ALREADY COULD. HE HAD BEEN WORKING ALL ALONG.

Then, in God's perfect timing, I met Dan. Many of you know him today as a member of our worship team. Every Sunday, as we serve together, I'm reminded that God answered a prayer I had prayed years earlier—not on my timeline, but on His. Looking back, I realize God wasn't only preparing Dan's heart. He was preparing mine.

That may be one of the hardest lessons of faith. Prayer isn't about convincing God to act. Prayer is about trusting that He already is.

Isaiah reminds us that God's ways are higher than our ways. What feels like silence to us may actually be God's careful preparation. What feels like waiting may actually be His faithful work behind the scenes.

I've learned that answered prayer isn't always about getting what I asked for when I asked for it. Sometimes it's about discovering that God has been answering my prayers all along—just in ways I couldn't yet see.

So, if you're waiting...Keep praying. If you're wondering whether God hears you...He does. If you're questioning whether He sees your circumstances...He does.



And if you're in one of life's first-and-third situations—where the outcome feels uncertain and every decision seems difficult—remember this:

- You are not coaching the game alone.
- God already sees the whole field.
- He knows every player. He sees every path. He understands every outcome long before we do.
- His timing is perfect. His promises are faithful. His plans are always greater than our own.

One day, you'll look back and realize that while you were waiting, God was connecting every piece of your story into something far more beautiful than you could have imagined.

HANDS UP! YOU'RE CALLED!

BY PASTOR JOANNA MITCHELL, SENIOR PASTOR



This fall our worship series will dive into the story of Abraham, whose call begins with abundant promises from God: *"I will make of you a great nation... and in you all the families of the world will be blessed"* (Genesis 12:2-3). Those promises took decades, even generations, to come to fruition. When I'm feeling impatient, I remind myself of how long Abraham waited.

WHEN I'M FEELING IMPATIENT, I REMIND MYSELF OF
HOW LONG ABRAHAM WAITED.

It's easy to read call stories in the Bible and assume they're only for the incredibly faithful, or the truly special. But the more I study scripture, the more I am convinced that we are all called, each in our own way – not just people like me, who lead a church. Our theme for Rally Sunday is Hands Up, and it captures that idea. What might God be inviting you to do to further your faith journey? Volunteer in a new way. Reach out to a friend you've lost touch with. Make a financial commitment to the church for the first time. Or – put your hand up to be in worship more often.



That's the invitation I want to extend to our whole church community this fall: commit to being in worship 3 out of 4 Sundays/Wednesdays, starting in September. I love this church, and I love the connections you make here with one another and, more than that, with God. I know life gets busy, but I'm convinced that gathering to hear the Gospel together is vital – not just to our well-being, but to our life with God. I grow through my own commitment to showing up, and through listening and learning from all of you.

THAT'S THE INVITATION I WANT TO EXTEND TO OUR WHOLE CHURCH
COMMUNITY THIS FALL: COMMIT TO BEING IN WORSHIP 3 OUT OF 4
SUNDAYS/WEDNESDAYS, STARTING IN SEPTEMBER.



Church attendance is a lot like exercise – once you take a break, it's hard to start again. If you've been away a while, consider this your invitation back in. If you've been coming periodically, maybe try a Wednesday evening this fall (our Wednesday band is fantastic – so is Sunday's, but come see for yourself). Either way, don't just come once. Come 3 out of 4 Sundays / Wednesdays. That's how habits are made.

CHURCH ATTENDANCE IS A LOT LIKE EXERCISE —
ONCE YOU TAKE A BREAK, IT'S HARD TO START AGAIN.

When I started swimming, the first week was the hardest. I didn't know where to go or what to do, and it was at 5:30am – which felt insane. But I went, and I committed to three times a week. That was 14 years ago, and I'm still swimming with my masters program. Making that commitment changed my life. Now I show up not necessarily for the swim, but because my friends are there, and because I'm a nicer, healthier person when I move my body.



In the same way, showing up to worship – even on days I don't feel like it, or after a service that didn't go the way I wanted – reminds me that worship isn't about me. It's about community, about God, about connection. When I let myself simply worship, I find myself filled in a life-giving way.

WHEN I LET MYSELF SIMPLY WORSHIP, I FIND MYSELF
FILLED IN A LIFE-GIVING WAY.

I know this is a big ask. Can you put your hands up and say, "I will be in worship 3 out of 4 Sundays, September through December"? I hope you can. Know that our worship team is committed to worship that's high-quality, grace-centered, and grounded in scripture taught in a way that's relevant to your life. Worship will be great, and I want you there.

Will you join me? I hope you're ready to put your hands up.



THE STORY GOD KEEPS TELLING

BY PASTOR MARIA MARKMAN, PASTOR OF FAITH FORMATION

When studying the Bible with other people, I hear the same phrases over and over: *Wow, I didn't know that was in there. I really like reading the Bible with other people. Kinda sounds like the times we're living in. I've heard this before, but it sounds different to me today.*



All of these are true. At Summer Festival Camp in July, our middle schoolers' presenter reminded us that the Bible is a hard book – more questions than answers, most days. But she encouraged us to keep reading and to read together. I think that's exactly right. Scripture can be challenging, but it can also surprise us, and even though it was written in an ancient context, it has a way of speaking straight into the times we're living in now.

WOW, I DIDN'T KNOW THAT WAS IN THERE. This summer we explored stories about women in the Bible that many of us had never learned before – it was as enlightening for Pastor Joanna and me researching them as it was for anyone in the room.

Here's what Christian education looks like at Grace this year.

Starting this fall in Bible study we'll go deeper into Abraham, David, the Gospel of Matthew, and the Beatitudes, meeting on Thursday Zoom (10:30–11:30am) and, for those who want more depth, Wednesday evenings (6:00–7:00pm).

I REALLY LIKE READING THE BIBLE WITH OTHER PEOPLE. So do I. Reading with others is like reading with another set of eyes – what makes me curious might spark something entirely different in you. Think of the preschoolers at Grace, whose favorite word is why, asked again the moment you finish answering. Their curiosity keeps inviting me to look deeper at things I've long answered with the Sunday school version: because the Bible tells us so. We have plenty of chances for our youngest members to keep asking, with middle and high schoolers and adult mentors alongside them, discovering God's story again together.

That same discovery keeps happening as our young people grow. You may have noticed a change this year: we didn't have a confirmation class this May. That's because our current class will be confirmed in October, on Reformation Sunday, while a new Own Your Faith cohort begins this fall and will be confirmed next fall.



KINDA SOUNDS LIKE THE TIMES WE'RE LIVING IN.

I'd have a small fortune if I got paid for every time I heard this. Our Graceful Seniors group spent this past year in Revelation and Ezekiel – two hard books – and found in them unexpected insight into our own political division and violence. We were reminded that although our circumstances feel unprecedented, God has been through this before and was faithful then just as God is faithful now. Our Outreach, Mental Health, and DEIA Building Belonging Teams keep leading us in reading Scripture with our neighbors in mind, helping us move from learning into action: how do we put faith into practice at Grace?



I'VE HEARD THIS BEFORE, BUT IT SOUNDS DIFFERENT TO ME TODAY.

You might wonder why we tell these same stories year after year. Part of the answer is that we believe Scripture is alive – every reading is a new one, because we're different than we were the last time, and our world has changed too. New things stand out. We see Jesus a little differently. The Bible isn't only a story about God; it's a story about the people of God, foibles and all. Maybe we tell it again and again, so we won't repeat our ancestors' mistakes – a very old, very human hope.



GOD HAS BEEN
THROUGH THIS
BEFORE AND WAS
FAITHFUL THEN
JUST AS GOD IS
FAITHFUL NOW.

It's the same hope I felt this past February, watching Hadestown with my best friend. In this jazzy retelling of the Orpheus myth, Orpheus travels to the underworld to bring Eurydice home, on one condition: he must walk the whole way without looking back. Near the end, doubt gets the better of him. He turns. I gasped out loud in a silent theater, even though I knew how the story went. But the show doesn't end there – Hermes steps forward and reminds us that though this story ends in tragedy, we'll sing it again, hoping each time the ending changes.

We do the same thing every time we open Scripture. We already know how the story goes. We read it again anyway, hoping it will change us.

THE STORY GOD KEEPS TELLING: WE ARE CALLED

BY WILL WEIKLE, CYF DIRECTOR

We had some really fun Youth Trips this summer! Our High School trip was back at Christikon, on a five-day backpacking trip through the wilderness in the Absorka-Beartooth Mountains of Montana, and our Middle School trip was back at Gustavus Adolphus College for Summer Festival Camp. The theme of Connections this month is “The Story God Keeps Telling: We Are Called.” We are called to experience the beauty of God’s creation. We are called to gather, to build community, and to come together to support and love one another. We are called to believe in God’s deep love for us. What better way to do that for our young people than to travel together on Christ-centered trips?

Up in the mountains, we had some incredible “mountain top” moments, and some great challenges to get through. One of the favorite adventures on the trip was our attempt to peak Monument Mountain, standing at almost 11,000 feet in elevation. While snow prevented from hiking the last stretch to get to the true peak, we were able to make it the majority of the way, passing through fields of wildflowers, a stunning precipice overlooking a piercingly blue glacial lake, and finding some boulders that went just high enough to claim just enough cell service for everyone to call home and say hi to loved ones.



By the last day of the trip, we were getting what the counselors called “trail brain,” where everything just becomes funny, and you find yourself getting caught with the giggles. One student caught them so badly during our final supper together that he was literally on the ground laughing for the entire meal, and unable to finish his food due to the most severe case of the giggles I have ever seen. His laughter brought much joy to the rest of the group.

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WHAT BETTER
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Summer Festival Camp was also a blast! It really seemed like there was something for everyone. For one activity, we got to design our own mini-golf course hole. It was a joy to see the student's engineering brains and the artistic creativity come together to create something fun. The live music was powerful, and earned the respect and admiration (and a little bit of headbanging) from the more musical students. The infamous annual messy fight was described as "synthentic applesauce" and brought out the best from the students who just wanted to make a big mess. The Caf is always a highlight of the trip, with soft serve ice cream being a staple at every meal (yes, even including breakfast!) Some of the students who have just completed 8th grade, and have been coming for their entire middle school career, are looking forward to possibly coming back to be a part of the leadership camp, and help out with their middle school successors next year!



Here are some photos from our time together at Christikon and at Summer Festival Camp. I hope you enjoy this glimpse into our stories!



THE STORY GOD KEEPS TELLING: WE ARE CALLED...

BY DIANNE GRABOWSKI

Diane is a member of W.O.W., worship ministries and has been a member of Grace since 2011.



W.O.W. Reunion

All past, present and future
W.O.W. participants are
invited to attend.

Wed. Sept. 2, 2026
11:30am-12:30pm

Pizza Ranch-Andover
13797 Jay St NW
Andover, MN 55304

Fifteen years ago, Grace Lutheran Church became my church home! If my memory is correct, I joined WOW (Women on Wednesdays) the following year and soon felt called by God to become a greater part of Grace's Women's Ministry. He kept telling me to use my talents as a former teacher to become a facilitator. What a joy to work with such incredible leaders. Each year we studied new topics and dug deeper to reach greater understanding. Before long, I invited one of my best friends to join WOW, then another friend, and eventually my sister, after she retired. None of these women even attend Grace, even though I'm working on them! I would never have guessed that God's gentle tug on my shoulder would result in

our friendships and spiritual lives growing stronger together. Texting prayer requests became common practice, but without WOW, I'm not sure this would have ever happened to this degree.

An important part of WOW is to participate in service projects. We have been involved in MANY over the years, as if God is calling us to help others in need! I find it interesting that during this time, you can feel God's presence as we tie blankets, make sandwiches for people that are homeless, pack bags for our cars to give to the homeless, adopt a family at Christmastime allowing us to shop together, taking the time to pick out exactly the right gifts for our family in need! These are only a few of the great opportunities we have shared serving our community!

EVERY GROUP WE BECOME A
PART OF BLESSES US WITH NEW
FRIENDS, PRAYER PARTNERS
WHO CARE DEEPLY ABOUT
EACH OTHER, AND, OF
COURSE, LAUGHTER!

Why do we keep coming back? We feel called to continue in this ministry because every group we become a part of blesses us with new friends, prayer partners who care deeply about each other, and, of course, laughter! WOW has become a part of our weekly life that would leave a hole if we didn't attend! We are being transformed and called to learn, grow,

and serve! Everyone is always welcome to join us in this adventure to discover, "The Story God Keeps Telling: We Are Called...!"

WOW is now called (Women of the Word) and meets on Wednesday mornings & evenings and Sunday evenings.



You are invited to
come and see what
W.O.W. is all about!

W.O.W. mornings will begin
on Wed. Sept. 16th at 9:30am

W.O.W. evening will begin
on Mon. Sept. 21st at 6:30pm

Women of the Word (W.O.W.) 2026-2027

Sept. 2nd-Pizza Ranch
Sept. 16th-Kick Off
Sept. 23rd-W.O.W. Starts
Sept. 30th
Oct. 7th
Oct. 14th
Oct. 21st- Pastor Maria Study
Oct. 28th
Nov. 4th
Nov. 11th
Nov. 18th-Pastor Maria Study

Dec. 2nd
Dec. 9th
Dec. 16th
Jan. 6th
Jan. 13th
Jan. 20th-Pastor Maria Study
Jan. 27th
Feb. 3rd
Feb. 10th
Feb. 17th-Pastor Maria Study
Feb. 24th

March 3rd
March 10th
March 17th-Pastor Maria Study
March 24th
April 14th
April 21st
April 28th
May 5th
May 12th
May 19th

UPCOMING FALL EVENTS



Grace Choir
Rehearsals begin
Tues. Sept. 1st
7:15pm

Student & Guardian
Catechism



Grace Lutheran Church
Orientation Night
Wed. Sept. 9th
at 6:00pm

WEDNESDAY
Night @ Grace
Beginning Sept. 16th

- 5:15pm - Family Pizza
- 5:50pm - Treble Makers
- 6:00pm - Bible Study
- 6:00pm - Kids Night Out
- 6:00pm - Studio 45
- 6:00pm - Catechism
- 7:00pm - Worship
- 7:45pm - Youth Group

NEW **MEMBER CLASS**

Sun. Sept. 27, 2026
11:30am



Scan the QR code
to sign up.



Sunday School



Grace Lutheran Church
starts on Sunday
September 27, 2026

First Communion Class

Sun., Sept. 27th
at 11:30am

First Communion Celebration
Sunday, Oct. 4th at both
worships.



Sign up on realm by
scanning the QR code.



Grace Lutheran Church
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Andover, MN 55304

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Address Service Requested

Rally Sunday!
September 13, 2026

9:30am-12:00pm

Ministry Fair!

Hot Breakfast!

Fun Activities!



**Hands up
in celebration!**



SUNDAY, SEPT. 20, 2026

WORSHIP AT 9:00AM
PROJECTS AT 10:00AM
LUNCH AT 12:00PM