



Prayer - Table Grace

Greenville UU Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

Covenant Group Session Plan

Written by Denise Frick, May 2015, revised September 2021

Welcome, Chalice Lighting: Here we are, together in this space. By our love and by our covenant, we make this a holy place. We light the chalice of Unitarian Universalism in honor of the light that lives in each of us, the light that shines among us, and the light we bring into the world

Personal Check In: Share something from your life since we last met and how you are feeling now.

Opening Reading

The Harvest

The silver rain, the shining sun,
the fields where scarlet poppies run
and all the ripples of the wheat
are in the bread that I do eat.
So when I sit for every meal
and say a grace I always feel
that I am eating rain and sun
and fields where scarlet poppies run.

~Alice C. Henderson, American poet, author and poetry editor. 1881-1949

Questions to prompt and guide discussion.

1. Share your experience of saying grace or a blessing before meals. In what way is this meaningful for you? How have your feelings about saying table grace changed over the years?
2. When you are at meals where table grace is said, how does it affect you?
3. Share your reactions to Brother Steindl-Rast's quote that offering a blessing "plugs us into the aliveness of the whole world".
4. Have you ever had the experience of being asked to say grace before a meal with relatives or some other group of people? How did that go? What meaning did you take from this experience? Were you able to stay true to your own religious beliefs?

Readings (Words from the Common Bowl: Quotes/Readings), see below.

Sharing - This is a time to speak without interruption and for deep listening. Deep listening means no interrupting, no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting each other straight. Please share responses to one or more of the session questions.

(This is usually a good time to take a brief break)

Open Discussion - This is a time to respond to something another person said about the topic or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared their thoughts on this topic. Continue to practice deep listening.

Closing Reading

Thank you for the wind and rain and sun and pleasant weather,
thank you for this our food and that we are together. Mennonite Blessing

Announcements/Plans

Personal Check Out: As we close today, how are you feeling now?

Extinguish the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Readings

Field at Table

When I begin to bless this food
and close my eyes I lose myself
first just in green: how
do leaves grow themselves this
green and how do they
grow at all to be so large and
how do they make themselves from
soil which in itself is only brown and
sunlight helps and water but

how is the end of this, *green*? How
can I bless this food? It blesses me.

Thank you, I say, for this bowl
which also is field, this green
which is meal before
I eat. *Thank you*, I say,
that this green becomes *me*.
Thank you for mysteries, this life.

~Rev. Nancy Shaffer, UU Minister, 1950-2002, <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/field-table>

A prayer before a meal is referred to as a “table grace.” The intent of such a prayer is two-fold: one is to encourage the spirit of gratefulness for the food, and another is so that the food will benefit us spiritually. Grace before the meal also takes the event of the meal out of just ordinary time and into sacred time. In this way, a simple table grace can induce the feeling of being blessed or having a sense of well being. What happens following a table grace can depend upon our religious training or upon the openness of the people to a religious experience.

~Rev. Ann C. Fox, UU Minister

Gratefulness – “great fullness,” as Brother David Steindl-Rask reminds us, “is the full response of the human heart to the gratuitousness of all that is.” Truly every single thing we have has been given to us, not necessarily because we deserved it, but gratuitously, for no known reason. And whatever source we believe is the giver – some concept of God or simply the breathtaking randomness of the universe—when we give thanks, we take our place in the great wheel of life, recognizing our connection to one another and to all of creation. Offering a blessing, reminds

~Brother Steindl-Rast, Catholic Benedictine Monk, from *A Grateful Heart, Daily Blessing for Evening Meal from Buddha to The Beatles*, Edited by M. J. Ryan

If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.

~ Meister Eckhart, German theologian

Further reading and references:

Table Grace, <https://www.uua.org/occasion/table-grace>

Prayers before meals for UU families, <https://www.beaconuu.com/2018/08/05/prayers-before-meals-for-uu-families/>

UU Table Graces, <https://uucentralct.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/UU-Table-Graces-Handout-1.pdf>